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WHOSE WAS THE BLAME?

A Woman's Version of the Kreutzer Sonata

BY

MRS JAMES GREGOR

WITH A PROLOGUE TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN OF

PRINCE GALITZEN

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Thou shalt do no Murder

By

PRINCE GALITZEN

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Thou shalt do no Murder

DEAR BROTHER,—

I am sending you a sketch of the last years of my life. I wrote it down in hours of misery—such as I have never experienced in the same degree since—for which I thank Heaven. I have only hidden one thing in my life from you, and I am about to disclose it to you now; indeed, I can never quite explain it to myself why I kept it as a secret from you. Perhaps I was ashamed to speak to you of the trouble that was on my mind. If a grief be too heavy, it cannot be discussed in conversation, though, as you know very well, there are many people capable of telling their sorrow to the first person they happen to meet—indeed, they do not hesitate to speak out before a dozen people who are total strangers to them; their sole motive for so doing seems to be prompted by a petty sentimental feeling of wishing to talk of their affairs.

I was silent during the space of five years, and you suspected nothing. You are more intimate with me

than any one else ; you are, in fact, my second self, and I know when you read this you will say, "He has acted rightly, as a good man would have done ;" besides, I assure you, I require no encouragement : I have no doubt in my mind that I have done what is right. These pages have lain by me for a long time : I could not make up my mind to send them to you. But now I have done so. You asked me, in one of your letters lately, whether I had read the "Kreuzer Sonata," and you added, "Every body has read it : you cannot escape from it any more than from influenza. What do you think of it ?" Well, when you have read the accompanying pages, you will know what I am forced to think of it.

CHAPTER I.

YOU know the last time we were together, for three whole months before my marriage: that is twelve years ago. Do you remember what a beautiful time that was for me? It was glorious! I enjoyed happiness in anticipation, just as if the coming peaceful joys had cast their rays upon us—that is, upon Nadine and me. Before I met her, I had never conceived the possibility of meeting any one who seemed created for me. I found in her all that I needed. Whenever I discovered a new trait in her character, I always felt it was the one indispensable something which I had been awaiting.

At the first meeting, which took place at the Princess Schawrow's house, where I was calling, I was struck with her beauty. Her eyes charmed me: they were so penetrating and true, and whilst her mother was enlarging, in the most discursive manner, on travels in Switzerland, and I was answering in a most emphatic manner, I felt those eyes turned towards me, and from their expression I knew she was thinking, "Why do you pretend to feel the

slightest interest in Switzerland?" But I was quite ready to listen to further descriptions of the bears at Berne, and the dulness of the inhabitants at Geneva, for it was so refreshing to look at Nadine.

But the Princess seemed evidently to think that I had gazed at the young girl long enough, and asked me whether, according to my opinion, the taking of Constantinople was necessary to Russia or not. I gave my answer, and took leave of the ladies. When I reached the street, the spell which Nadine had thrown over me was distinctly weaker, and twice I could think of nothing but her mother's ugly earrings. Three hours later I had completely forgotten both.

The next day I met her again. It was in the theatre, and the opera *Russelke* was being performed. When I rose, after the first act, I became conscious of her presence. I bowed: the ladies returned my greeting with a gracious smile, and I at once resolved to go to their box. This time Nadine's personal appearance made no impression upon me whatever. I saw, of course, that she was pleasing, and that she had a charming face; but all this seemed to be in the background. I was specially charmed with her conversation, so different from the ordinary talk between the acts which one knows by heart beforehand. I felt at once that one could talk with her on all subjects, not only on music, on the weather, or on Switzerland. Indeed, she confirmed this in no un-

certain manner, for when I asked her "And do you sing yourself?" she answered quickly, "No, I do not sing; I play the piano neither better nor worse than most people; I seldom go to the theatre; I have heard Patti three times; and I have not lost any relations in the late war."

I looked at her in astonishment.

"You see," she said, by way of explanation, "these questions were bound to come sometime. I have answered them all, so we can now have a real talk."

"Nadine!" her mother called out severely.

"Miss Nadine is perfectly right," I ventured to say, and tried to prove this in my behaviour, but she had somewhat disconcerted me, and from sheer ill-luck no brilliant remark suggested itself to me.

But my future mother-in-law kept the wheels of small-talk rolling. She related her biography without a pause. It appeared she was a widow—her husband had died from a stroke of paralysis seven years before. She possessed two estates, and a house in Moscow and in dear St. Petersburg, where she had been born and brought up; her money was invested in Government securities, and Nadine had received a domestic education, "*qui ne ce cède en rien à l'éducation de Smolnoy.*"

While her mother was speaking, Nadine looked anxiously about. Probably the long tirade to which I had been treated was a sort of circular addressed

to all young men. I felt sorry for the girl when I realized this.

"She is ashamed of it," I said to myself.

At this moment I noticed how well she was dressed—particularly well, I thought. You know how some women are remarkable for their neck, their hands, their toilette, but this girl seemed to say, "Look straight into my eyes, and then you will know me." There are people who fall in love with a toilette, because they look upon woman as the copy of a fashion-plate. Such men would have been pleased with Nadine's style, and her dress was striking.

During the next interval there came into the box a Staff Officer with a hideous voice and a fair-haired young man with a silken moustache. The latter was very awkward in his manner, blushed at every moment, and stammered when he answered. His whole conversation was made up of answers, for he was incapable of suggesting anything on his own account. The Princess presented us to one another, of course ; but, as often happens on such occasions, I did not catch his name. Nadine was very indifferent in her manner towards the Staff Officer ; she was on terms of playful familiarity with the fair-haired young man, towards me she showed herself, if possible, even more amiable. You are perhaps surprised that I should tell you all these details, but it is necessary that I should do so.

It was during this interval that I felt I had lost my heart to Nadine. Everything in her appealed to me: her face, her movements, and especially her voice, which seemed to come from her heart, and which moved me deeply. Though I could not look into her inmost soul, I felt convinced that she could have no faults.

You think I fell in love with her simply because she was beautiful? No, this was not the case. All of us who move in society are accustomed to meet many beautiful women and girls, but we do not fall in love with them. Therefore beauty is not the cause of this, for it is only a negative attraction; that is, only an absence of ugliness, and ugliness prevents love. Besides, by exception, ugly women can be very attractive. The chief thing is that the souls should appeal to one another; whoever denies this and maintains that only physical charms attract us, he is deeply to be pitied. When I left the box, I made up my mind not to return. I began to feel somewhat strained, but I found it was impossible to remain in the theatre without going to them. I therefore went away. At first I turned my steps homewards, but I felt a sudden terror of sitting alone in my vast bachelor quarters, where everything would seem at variance with my present state of mind.

Yes, it was love—the beginning of love, a feeling that resounded like loud music in my heart. All my

impressions seemed affected by the sound of this music. You think me sentimental. No; it was something pure, the uneasiness of a new joy. I made no pictures in my mind concerning the future. I never even told myself that I should marry Nadine. I only felt that in her company I should lead a new, fair, and glorious life.

I did not go home, but made my way to join Baebmatshow at supper. I had met him that morning in the street, and he had told me that in the evening he was to bid farewell to his bachelor life because he was to be married on the morrow to the daughter of a fabulously rich merchant, of the name of Jelesarno. After telling me this, he had begged me to join him at Donon, where there would be dinner and ladies, supper and ladies, etc.

I had accepted the invitation out of politeness, for I had a great repugnance for the usual festivities held by the gay little circle of the gilded youth of St. Petersburg. It is these men who leave the impression that men of higher society spend their time in low restaurants in the company of degraded women. I need not say that I took no part in these indecencies. I will give no description of what took place. You know how horrible these festivities sometimes become, not only because wine and spirits flow freely; not only because the men drink more than they can stand, but principally because of the disgusting conversation in

which they indulge over their cups. Baebmatshow himself was not very drunk: he had only reached the stage when a man considers it quite unnecessary to restrain himself in the expression of any feelings, however coarse. When he saw that I looked round angrily at the intoxicated assembly, he pretended to be quite sober, drew me beside him on a couch, dropped heavily down, and called for soda water.

"I am going to be married," he began in a serious tone, as if he were announcing something novel.

"Yes, I know; that is all right. I congratulate you."

"I am not sure," he said, "whether there is not a lurking irony in your congratulations. You despise me, of course, because, having squandered my fortune, I seek to redeem it by the merchant's millions, and practically exchange them against the title of Countess I offer his daughter."

"Such cases are not rare," I observed, by way of saying something.

"Not rare? This is better than ever. But I cannot understand what evil people can see in this. It is certainly not dishonourable. I take money, and I give myself in exchange. Marriage is a mere hollow sound. Does one get engaged for love, or does one enter the marriage contract for any such reason? Don't talk such rubbish to me."

"You woo capital, titles, dignities and social

position. Do you consider this any worse than marrying for mere beauty's sake? It is purer? That's all nonsense! it is high time we threw aside these marinated ideals and admitted the truth. Believe me, it is high time—for out of a hundred marriages, ninety-nine are made for some motive of self-interest. Let me say one word more: if I were poor, as poor as a church mouse, and married for 5,000 roubles, you would not think of despising me, though those 5,000 would not be more necessary to me to live than these 5,000,000. Do you understand me? It is a mere question of arithmetic, though you insist upon treating it as a moral one and preaching me a sermon. I repeat it—this is an arithmetical question, not a moral one."

He seemed greatly pleased with his words, and looked at me quite triumphantly. I did not answer, because I was really quite indifferent as to the views he held. I could not feel moved by his cynicism, which was too coarse to appeal to me.

"As for love," he continued, "it is mere idle chatter. In a year's time, or even after a month, the love no longer exists; you may believe my words. Then comes disillusion, treachery, and a rejoicing over a fresh scandal."

"Is this quite unavoidable, in your opinion?" I could not help asking. "Is it not possible to conceive a different state of things?"

"In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is so. Let us suppose you marry a beautiful girl, who has pleased you on account of her pretty face, and because her clothes are elegant and produce a fine effect. Supposing she gets small-pox, or that her dressmaker takes it into her head to spoil her clothes. Ha, ha! what becomes of your love then? You beat a hasty retreat."

He was evidently delighted with himself. His common expression seemed to himself astonishingly convincing. Was it worth while reminding him that we could see hundreds of examples of honourable and happy marriages around us at this moment, and that he was looking at the world from his own low standpoint? Certainly not. But I felt if he went on we should come to blows. I was in the unpleasant situation of a man who is insulted without any reason by a drunkard in the street.

Fortunately one of Baebmatschow's friends came up at this moment, and the conversation took another turn. I remained for a short while, and tried to join the party in drinking, but gave it up, and returned home.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN I awoke next day, I felt calm and indifferent. "I am certainly not in love," I thought to myself; but scarcely had this thought passed through my mind, than I felt a sort of tightening of my heartstrings; it was as if something had suddenly awakened that had hitherto slept. And from that very moment I appeared to be borne down by some outside overwhelming power.

I did not know whether that power was for good or evil; I only felt that I had entirely changed my nature.

This feeling at my heart was mixed pleasure and pain. I continually contrasted in my mind the two evenings I had with Nadine. Each one of her words, and the expressions of which she had made use, came back to mind, and I felt as if I saw her and heard her more distinctly than when I was in her presence. "Why do I love her?" I asked myself. Surely not because she is beautiful! I have met many more beautiful girls, who have not moved me in the

slightest degree. She has never given utterance to anything at all remarkable; indeed, she is very much like other girls, and yet she has crept into my heart, she has found a chord there which had hitherto remained untouched. Altogether I felt in the most confused state of mind; I was only clear on one point, and that was, that I wished to marry her. And I reflected how beautiful life would be if my hopes in this respect were realized.

I was not yet able to paint the rosy future in clear colours to my mind: I only felt a general impression. It seemed to me as if some magic chord had been struck in my heart, the separate notes of which I was unable at present to distinguish.

But I knew the tones were fresh and pure. I seemed to have torn myself completely away from my past life, as if I were looking down upon it from a higher plane. I saw much that was unlovely in that past life, but I realized that this had only been possible as long as my spiritual nature had not been awakened; now such things were completely strange to me. Then anxiety came upon me. I began to think my dream would never be realized. What right had I to hope that she would become my wife? If she accepted me, it would be out of love; and why should I suppose that she would bestow her affection on me rather than on that Staff Officer?

I remember the recollection of that man worried me not a little. I do not know why I gave him the preference and not the young, fair-haired man with the silken moustache, or the nine or ten other young men who were doubtless paying court to Nadine without my being aware of the fact.

I tried to console myself with the reflection that he had a hideous voice, and that he was a very commonplace man ; but it was of no avail. Perhaps she thought my voice ugly, and considered me a coxcomb. My opinion went for nothing — only Nadine's counted for anything.

Then very foolish thoughts came into my mind ; and when I recall it now, I fall to pitying my poor former self. This is why I linger over these details, to which I have never before alluded.

My excitement became all the keener because of my desire to go to the house. I nearly fell ill, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I could postpone my visit to the proper time demanded by the usage of society. I was very nervous, lest my appearance should cause Nadine astonishment. Perhaps the Princess had only asked me out of politeness, and had not reckoned on my presenting myself so soon.

It was, however, quite impossible to me to postpone my visit to the following day. So I went with much misgiving and trembling of heart, as if I were being forced into it by some evil genius. I felt certain that

the meeting would prove decisive, and I pictured to myself that I should know my fate before I left the house. But I was mistaken. The visit was quite an ordinary one, and passed off without anything particular taking place.

I paid something like twenty visits after this, without bringing about any change in our relation to one another, except that I was no longer merely in love, but loved with all my heart. I learnt to know Nadine. More than ten times I felt it was my duty to speak, and the expression of her face seemed encouraging, for though there was neither joy, love nor pride in her face, yet she seemed to say: You have spoken well and acted rightly. Others did not see it in the same light: sometimes I thought she did love me, and that on the morrow I would ask for her hand. But when the morrow came, I found a changed expression on her face. The old Princess was as amiable towards me as she was to all the other guests. Amongst these were five or six unmarried men, three of whom were obviously in love with Nadine, but they roused in me no particular jealousy, for it seemed to fritter away when divided amongst them all. I only knew that I should be terribly unhappy if she became the wife of another.

At last I came to a decision: it was on Christmas evening. The Princess had provided a Christmas tree for her little nephews, and, as is the custom, she in-

vited the "grown-ups," who, having gazed at the tree in a hurried, nervous manner, hastened into the adjoining room, where the card tables were prepared. Nadine was busy with the tree: she was distributing the presents, and was very merry.

I was filled with the thought that some day she would adorn just such another tree for her—for my children.

"Nadine," I said, when she came to my side after the distribution was over, "can you spare me a few moments?"

"Yes; what do you want?" she asked, astonished. I was confused and afraid, as if I had been meditating some wrong thing.

My thoughts must have betrayed themselves on my face, for she looked at me attentively, and then she blushed. I saw that she had understood, and felt inexpressibly thankful that this was so. "Will you be my wife?" I asked softly. "I will," she answered, in a slow, measured tone. I was surprised at myself for being able to listen quietly to such an answer. I wondered why I did not scream for joy, or commit some other folly. The stream of happiness that flowed through my heart was so overpowering that it seemed to carry away with it all the grief I had ever known in my life.

She saw this, and smiled; then she waited for me to say something. But I could not speak. I could

only gaze upon her with the delicious consciousness that she was mine—that even to me belonged the thoughts and feelings that were sparkling in her eyes.

"Shall we go at once to my mother?" she said at last.

"At once!" I said, in astonishment. It struck me that this was childish and almost absurd.

But it was not absurd. We found the Princess alone in the dining-room. She listened to the news without displaying any excitement; she only smiled, and said she would give her consent. In a moment the news spread among the guests, and they at once offered their congratulations. Then they brought us champagne—and somehow this seemed to me a touch of prose after the poetry.

CHAPTER III.

THEN began so fair a time in my life that no subsequent events could ever efface its memory.

You must have noticed what a sense of comfort we feel when we meet with a truly sympathetic person, even when we hear nothing of special interest fall from their lips. The sense of comfort we feel is merely in the fact of our meeting them at all. This is the feeling we both had, my wife and I. Each was happy in the fact that the other existed. At least, it was the case with me, and I believe she felt the same.

Every impulse of my life was associated with hers: her image filled all my thoughts, even though I was not always conscious of it. Her soul was like a coloured glass, through which I looked out on the world. But mine was not the blind love that turns a man into the slave of the woman. I was always the element of strength, and she of pleasure.

You were away at that time travelling, if you remember. I was sorry at the time, for I often longed to cry out to you, "Was there ever such joy?" Now I regret it still more.

My work often detained me in St. Petersburg, but we always spent the summer in the country. The Princess died during the first year of our marriage; she wandered in her mind considerably during the last illness.

Nadine mourned very deeply for some days, and this sorrow seemed to bring us nearer to one another: she felt that I was everything to her, and I was proud that it was so.

We lived completely for one another. She never showed any interest in my business occupations, out of consideration for me; and I liked to have it thus, and to see her happy and merry. Our house was always filled with guests, and we were always giving balls, dinners, and pic-nics. You cannot think how many fell in love with her, and considering her beauty and intelligence, this was scarcely surprising. But I give you my word for it, no pang of jealousy ever entered into my heart—not because I believed it impossible for her to go astray, but because I knew she was incapable of deceiving me. When my wife smiled on one, or nodded to another, or begged a third to come as often as possible, there came to me none of that petty jealousy such as a lackey might indulge in. I say a lackey, and I condemn the feeling, because an honourable man should not be capable of such smallness. He considers everybody as honourable as himself, as long as he is cleverly deceived.

I do not mean to intimate that my wife deceived me at that time—no, she was absolutely free of blame; but there are so many who drive their wives into guilt by showing suspicion. Of this I was not guilty. She deceived me (yes, Vladimir, I now tell you what you never suspected up to this day), because there was this evil latent in her heart. But for this, she would have been perfect. I was happy as long as I believed her to be perfect, and as long as she would still respect herself.

There is something in all of us that rebels against perfection. I sometimes thought that she deliberately forgot her dignity, for her treachery—— But we will come to that later on. You know that I was always of a religious nature. I seldom go to church, but I am always convinced that there is a God above who protects, saves, punishes, and loves us. For this reason I feared nothing at that time. I knew that evil and danger existed, but I thought they would not come near me. Again I am wandering from the point. I have not yet described to you the fulness of my happiness. When a son was born to us, I felt that I had realized the greatest joy that can fall to the human lot: my whole life seemed to be bathed in the sunshine of joy. Often in moments of depression I had looked upon myself as useless in this world, for the business I was managing could have been equally well managed by thousands of others; now all at

once was revealed to me the end and object of my life, for I felt my duty towards this little child, and from the moment when I heard his first cry, I felt I could devote myself entirely to him. From this time onward I seemed to exist only in relation to the child. Everything I did was done with a view to his future, and this consciousness was a source of real joy to me and raised me in my own eyes! My wife was able to nurse the child herself, and this was a further tie between us. Of course we committed many follies at first, for young parents are often ridiculous; but they are not ridiculous when they tremble for the health of their child, when they gaze with pale faces into the cot where the little one is tossing about, neither knowing what is the matter with it. They are not ridiculous when they are ready to sacrifice everything for this same little creature, who is still too small to distinguish his father and mother from strangers. They are not ridiculous when they seek with faltering voice the help of the physician, and when they joyfully take all sorrow upon themselves, in order to bring back a smile to the face of their child.

But there are bad fathers and bad mothers, who behave to their children as a bitch to her young, who will calmly look on while her puppies are being strangled in the snow, and who, after a year, will not know her young again. There are people who are not capable of sacrificing their pleasure to their young,

who often complain and say that children are so disturbing and troublesome — these are contemptible people.

Others, again, say: "Why should one worry about children, or tremble for their health? Everything depends on the will of God. He alone can help our skill, or that of the physician avails nothing."

And yet the same people, if a house were burning, would all cry for help, and would not be content to rely on Divine Providence. Lies, lies everywhere! Let people lie if they cannot do anything else, or if it is necessary, so that they may distinguish themselves by the originality of their views. But why should they drag God's name into it? Why should they use religion, the purest and highest good of our lives, as a mantle to cover their base selfishness? Alas! Schopenhauer and Hartmann are much more often read than the Gospel.

You are perhaps surprised that I speak more of myself than my wife, as if she were a secondary person in my sad story. That is also egotism! I am painting the background from which *my* sorrows stand out as if *she* had suffered nothing. Does shame bring with it no pain?

We are all so small, so very small, that we should like to see ourselves through a microscope; perhaps my wife came to grief because married life offered her less happiness than to me.

For me this life was, as it were, a refuge from, and to her an entry to, the world. I was resting from the work of life which she was only beginning; a spiritual intercourse with her gave me fresh strength, but could I do the same for her?

You have often said that he who has sown his wild oats before marriage should never enter into that contract, because, in his relations with his wife, he can never rid himself of his former guilt.

But you are mistaken in this, or at least you are only right with respect to those men who marry for the sake of beauty, or for those petty enjoyments which are consecrated by law. Honourable marriages —and they are not unfrequent—are not based on love of this kind; an ideal marriage cannot spring from such a union.

I loved my wife whether I saw her or not. My love did not consist only of caresses, for upon love was grafted friendship, which is more necessary than love. I felt esteem for her and myself, and there was absolute confidence between us.

It is said that such a condition of things is rare. This is not true; if it were not so, honourable people would not enter into the contract of marriage, and legitimate children would not exist; as it is, it is impossible to deceive honourable people! Yes, but not always. What happened to me does not happen to all. It would be easier to say, "See, I was a good man; my wife had many merits," and so on.

When my wife made up her mind to be unfaithful to me, her conduct was bad and dishonourable, but any escape from the consequence of it, or any revenge for her conduct, would have been still more dishonourable. Have I any right to bespatter others with the mud on my path? Besides, if I were to say "All women wished to deceive their husbands—marriage is a foolish institution which has no existence in nature," nobody would say that my conscience was clear; on the contrary, I should merely be dubbed as a stern moralist.

Most people care nothing about appearances, but it would be unfair to judge from a flecked exterior that the whole man was defiled. One may be able to show clean garments, and yet have gone through the mire. The former idea of honour was consistent and uniform; the present generation is clouded—there are even some who take a dung-cart for the car of Juggernaut, and who say, "Let us throw ourselves under the wheels."

I recall the words of the Apostle Paul in the first epistle to Timothy:—

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

"Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

"Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain

from meats, which God hath created. . . . But refuse profane and old wives' fables."

The belief of parents in the perfection of their children used formerly to seem absurd to me. Each one says: "My son is better, perhaps not more clever or more beautiful, but better."

Now, I find simply that my son *is* "better" I see myself perfected in him. Unconsciously I tried to develop perfection in him; all his faults appear to me as passing errors, which will change or disappear under good influence. And though I may be mistaken, yet, paradoxical as it sounds, I believe I am right. You who are childless cannot understand this. Once our Professor, in one of his lectures, touched on this point, as to why parents loved their children, or children their parents, and he came to the conclusion that it is not the duty of children to love their father and mother, but it is the duty of father and mother to love their children, because—— I need not describe this any further, as you will understand. And these words were spoken by a man who had children of his own. It was coarse indeed; but many of my colleagues agree to this theory.

CHAPTER IV.

THIS happiness lasted more than four years, then sorrow came suddenly and roughly, as if it were weary of waiting. It appeared in the form I least expected, as if Circumstances had wished to fall upon me by stratagem, and serve to bring about my humiliation.

You know we spent every summer in the country on my estate at Gurkomer, for the castle was finer there than on Nadine's estate; besides, I did not care to give up the superintendence of affairs there. Every year there came to us a large number of guests who helped to make our country life pleasant and joyful. But this year we had no guests except our immediate neighbours, for all our acquaintances seemed to have arranged to spend the hot season in St. Petersburg or abroad. We felt no *ennui*; Nicholas was four years old. When I was not riding in the fields, I began to show him his alphabet, and make letters for him on the sand.

My supervision of the estate occupied me a great

deal, and this season's hunting was very good; snipe, which are such rare visitors in these parts, came over the sea in swarms.

My wife found the absence of guests very good, and said it gave her more opportunity of attending to her poultry yard and fruit garden. Kolja helped her; that is to say, he ate the fruit and chased the hens. In any case, we did not need any one; loneliness was a new and unusual thing to us.

Once I was coming back through the fields, after giving my horse in charge of a workman, and was in a particulary good humour, because I saw there was no fear of storms. I saw my wife coming to meet me.

"A telegram from Stebnitzius!" she called from the distance, waving the paper in the air.

"From Stebnitzius!" I said, smiling at her bright face. "Who is that?"

"Don't you know him? He studied for some years at Heidelberg."

"In this case, of course I don't know him, for I was not with you in Heidelberg. Therefore I could not meet your friends there."

"No, I'm surely not mistaken; my mother introduced him to you before our marriage. I think it was at the theatre."

I certainly could not remember the fact, but I attached no importance to that at the time. I looked

at the telegram, which ran thus: "Shall arrive day after to-morrow, early train.—STEBNITZIUS."

While I was absently trying to find out from the postal direction how long the telegram had taken to come, Nadine told me that Stebnitzius had returned to St. Petersburg after an absence of many years, and had heard of her marriage, and how, as an old acquaintance (for they had known each other since their earliest childhood), he was waiving all ceremony, and was coming to pay us a visit.

"You will see," she said, "he is an absurdly comical man, as awkward and shy as a young girl."

"Well, I should think they would have cured him of that in Heidelberg."

My wife reflected a moment, and then she said, "No, that cannot be."

We went into the house; Kolja came running to meet us, and chattered about his dog, with whom he was always playing, and to whom he was very attached. After I had kissed him, I turned to my wife.

"We must have a room prepared for him. Which do you think of?"

"The grey room near the billiard room," she suggested.

We left Kolja with the nurse, and went up to the second story.

The grey room turned out to be in perfect order; even the clock was wound up. While we went down

the stairs, I asked, "Why did he study at Heidelberg? Were the Russian universities not good enough for him?" Nadine explained to me that our future guest was very delicate, and required a warm climate. I immediately pictured to myself a young man of sallow complexion, with watery eyes and narrow chest. Being strong and healthy myself, I could not bear delicate people, and I felt a dislike to this Stebnitzius, on this account. We should probably have to send for the doctor, and our house would smell like an apothecary's shop. When my wife told me his name was Avenir, I was quite disgusted, but I said nothing to Nadine, out of regard for her feelings. This friend of her youth must certainly be an idiot, but she felt attached to him because they had once played ball together. Explain it as you will—call it foreboding, or refuse to believe it, but I could not get Stebnitzius out of my mind. His coming appeared to me to be so strange. Why did he come? Who had bid him do so? At tea I said to Nadine, "Had you had any news of Stebnitzius lately?"

She laughed.

"No; why?"

"But why does he come?" I asked, somewhat annoyed.

"I do not know myself," said my wife simply.

I could contain myself no longer, and said, "You call that timid? Either he is an idiot——"

"Yes, he is very funny—very funny indeed."

When I was obliged to drive to the station to meet our guest, Nadine begged me to be friendly to him. I laughed. "Of course I shall be friendly to him. How could you imagine I could be otherwise?"

During the quarter of an hour I took going from the estate to the station, I tried many times to solve the question as to why Stebnitzius's projected visit was so disagreeable to me. As I could find no solution to the problem, I concluded I had become somewhat of a misanthrope, and that I dreaded the sight of new faces, for this sometimes happens in the country. Nor did it strike me as strange that only a month's sojourn in the country should have brought this about. I had scarcely reached the station, when the train arrived. A traveller stepped out on to the platform whom I at once recognised as Stebnitzius, for I remembered then seeing him five years ago in the Princess's box during the interval between the second and third act of *Russelke*—he was the fair man with the silken moustache. Now he was a handsome, strong fellow with a tawny beard. Health and self-confidence seemed to breathe from him, nor could I detect anything particularly comical about him. I went up to him and introduced myself. He returned my greeting very politely, without the slightest shyness or hesitation, such as is often felt by newcomers. I was somewhat disturbed by his calmness.

I called the porter, gave him hasty orders, informed Stebnitzius my wife would be delighted to see him, and asked if he had much luggage. He stood calmly on the platform, looked about him in an unconcerned manner, and replied to my somewhat excited remarks in quiet, polite tones ; his calmness began to get on my nerves—"Some drunken beer-bibber," I said to myself. He had a great deal of luggage ; he evidently anticipated a long stay with us. We drove off. On the way I took a somewhat careless and easy tone: this seemed, however, to make very little impression upon him. "I suppose he takes me for a fool," I thought to myself angrily, and I resolved to turn the tables upon him, and prove to him that he was the fool, not I. "He's a regular Hodge," I grumbled to myself as I looked at his broad stature.

It annoyed me that he should offer no explanation for forcing his way into a family with whom he had so slight an acquaintance. He doubtless considered me in the light of a trifling detail who happened to be part of my wife's surroundings. Nadine's reception of him was most cordial, which annoyed me considerably, for I could not conceive why one should show any sort of attention to every booby that came one's way. She expressed much surprise at the change in his outward appearance, for which he accounted by relating in detail the benefit he had derived from the air in Heidelberg—he even drifted into descriptions

of scenery. When we sat down to lunch, he refused "liqueurs" and wine, explaining that he confined himself to beer. I sent for ale, and, for the nonce, my angry mood gave way to a mocking one. He struck me as a student of the "Fliegenden Blättern" type, whose University life was spent in beer taverns.

He talked the whole time, telling stories in a monotonous voice peculiar to himself. My wife laughed, and I could not help taking a certain amount of interest in what he said; and though I should like to have asked him what he intended doing, and what plans he had made for the future, I refrained from so doing, lest he should really think I had any personal interest in him. You can explain the matter as you please, but from the moment of his arrival I felt beside myself.

After lunch he went to his rooms, to "smarten himself up a bit," as he expressed it—which was quite unnecessary, as he had changed already on the journey.

When I was alone with my wife, I said, "I don't like that fellow: he looks as if he drank."

"Yes," she answered; "I scarcely recognised him as the same man, but you must be indulgent: good manners are not a strong point in Heidelberg."

"Does he intend to introduce the manners of Heidelberg here? Did you notice that he never even looked at Kolja at all?"

"Unmarried men never care for children," Nadine explained.

I shrugged my shoulders, and said: "Do as you please, but this is not a guest at all to my taste. Pray let him enjoy to the full all the pleasures our rural life can afford, but I beg you will keep him out of my way. He is your guest, and I wash my hands of him entirely."

Nadine did not look best pleased, but she made no answer. I drove to the farmyard, spent four hours there, and only returned at dinner-time. Stebnitzius received me most graciously. I use the word "received" intentionally, for from his whole behaviour, and from the condescending politeness he affected toward me, one would certainly have imagined that he and not I were master of the house.

I admit that I was boiling over with rage as we sat at table. I wished with all my heart that he would say something rude, but he was amiable to excess; he even asked after Kolja, as to how old he was, and whether he had begun to do lessons. Kolja did not like him, and looked at him with a gloomy countenance. My wife kept up a friendly tone, while I sat there like a fool. I cannot now think why Stebnitzius should have produced so intensely irritating an effect upon me.

After lunch I went to the counting-house, quarrelled with the steward—who was, after all, in no way responsible for the fact that I had a guest staying in the house whose appearance displeased me. I had

no inclination to go home and listen to Stebnitzius's voice.

After tea, however, I somewhat recovered my spirits, for a quarrel broke out between Stebnitzius and myself. He was one of those men who extol the West, because the hotels are grander, the restaurants are more lively, and the peasants more inclined to take part in politics. It was quite easy to address the most cutting remarks in the politest manner possible, and to drive him into such a corner that his stupidity would be apparent even to himself.

My wife was silent: she was not pleased, but I was thoroughly content.

Imagine three weeks spent in this same stupid manner. Stebnitzius had regularly settled down with us, and apparently had no immediate intention of forsaking us. The whole state of things was so distasteful to me that I spent whole days away, under the pretext of business or hunting—merely that I might not have to see him.

I was angry with my wife, for, great Heavens! what could she have to talk to him about? But I did not ask her: there was no longer complete openness between us.

Kolja also took a dislike to Stebnitzius, and was afraid of his loud voice. Our guest himself was quite at his ease, and not the least hurt by my conduct.

CHAPTER V.

IT seems to me that I have given purposely much space to detail, so that I might avoid dwelling too long on the principal matter. Even now my anger is so terrible when I think of it, that I feel as though I were living through it a second time. But the time has come when I must tell you all.

It was at the beginning of August, in the middle of the hot season. Once after dinner, when I had been really rude to Stebnitzius, and my wife more amiable than usual, I felt an irresistible desire to go away—not to the fields, where the working people would prevent me from thinking, but somewhere where I should be quite undisturbed. I was suffering unspeakably, without being able to assign any cause for it. You must not imagine that I was jealous—there was not the slightest trace of such a feeling in my heart. If any one had told me that my wife loved Stebnitzius, I should have shrugged my shoulders and looked upon the matter as quite impossible. I had too high an opinion of Nadine. I took my gun, and went out to the stretch of marshy land over-

grown with bush which lies behind our park. You know how often you wandered unsuccessfully over this ground with your gun. The evening before, snipe had been seen in that direction.

I wished to be alone and think over matters: it troubled me to think of any breach between my wife and myself. To think that such folly—to think that a want of friendly feeling on my part for the friend of her youth should bring any bitterness of heart against me! I made a firm resolution to control myself, and to be more amiable to him.

The pointer Tifon came running up to me, looking at me in so friendly a manner, and wagging his tail so joyfully, that I was seized with a desire to hunt. I sprang over the moat which runs round the park, and went with the dog towards the marsh. It was seven o'clock; the heat began to abate. I became more easy in my mind, and I said to myself, "What a good thing Stebnitzius does not hunt, or I should have him on my hands here." There were really snipe to be found there. After I had shot down one or two, I noticed it was getting dark, and it was time to go home.

I marched on with Tifon again towards the park—I stumbling over the mounds of earth, Tifon scrambling joyfully through them, heaping them up again. Suddenly he stopped before a great bush, and raised himself up. "Another shot," I thought, and put up

my gun. Tifon sprang forward, and a hare rushed out. I was so astonished that a few seconds elapsed before I took aim. I cannot, even to-day, think without a shudder of that hare's piercing cry. The poor animal stopped short, beat about with its paws, and began to cry out with a voice like a child's. Fortunately Tifon finished it off, or else I think it would have escaped, for it did not occur to me to send a second shot through its head.

I turned my steps homeward in a very bad temper: a weight lay on my mind as if I had committed murder. Why had I shot the hare? Did I need it? in any case, it was more necessary to a hungry wolf than to me. My nerves were so overwrought that I assure you that I resolved never to hunt any more.

I rushed through the park, sprang over the moat, and took a short cut through the orchard.

Tifon wagged his tail and ran home. I often think what a misfortune would have happened if I had had him with me—he would have barked—and then? I must tell everything in order as far as it is possible to do.

The night came on apace. I walked slowly over the soft ground of the alley, upon which the moon, shining through the rows of trees cast broad shadows. My nerves refused to be quieted, and the soft night seemed to excite them still more, just as a fractious child cries more violently when caressed by its

mother. I could not get the sound of that hare's cry out of my head. Suddenly I stood still—at the bend of the broad walk, ten steps before me, my wife and Stebnitzius were walking towards the house, folded in each other's embrace, speaking in that trembling, suppressed voice which whispers, "I love you." I cannot think how I had time to formulate my thoughts so clearly.

My first impulse was to raise my gun, but then the thought of my son came upon me with unspeakable pain, and the image of his pert, laughing little face came before me. How could I kill his mother? Yes, one can kill such a mother and her paramour—there the thought broke off as if some awful, fearful obstacle stood in the way; the words, "Thou shalt do no murder," flashed suddenly through my mind, then following straight upon them came the remembrance of that trite saying, "*Qui va à chasse perd sa place*," and I remembered a picture in a Paris newspaper representing the bloody revenge of an injured husband, and then there came upon me a wild, enervating fury. I wanted to raise the gun, or throw it away, but I could not do it; there came upon me a horror of all things and all men—a feeling as if everything were breaking up about me. Then came shame and grief; if they had seen me, I should have run away.

At last I pulled myself together, and murmured, "They are talking there together."

I sat down on a seat, and began to follow them with my eyes, without any thought in my mind, except that they would soon turn into the long alley, and I should no longer be able to see them. Again I saw the embrace, and then they turned into the wide path. Then I stood up and hurried home. For the first time I realized how truly wretched I was, and that I must put an end to this misery. What that end would be I did not know; I think my mind was wandering for a time.

"Why should all happen in this way," I thought, "in so common and coarse a manner?"

And I began to think to whom was I addressing this question, and I thought of you and of the last time we were together, and in an incongruous way I remembered how anxious you were because you thought you had lost your precious eye-glass.

I was miserable indeed, and my heart was bereft, but I felt incapable of action. And yet I felt sure my energy would return when it was needed.

"But I will do no murder," I whispered, fearing all the time I was capable of it.

The left barrel of my gun was still loaded, and I wished to take the cartridge out, but my trembling fingers were powerless to do so. I fired into the air, and the sound resounded on all sides. "What if I had aimed at them?" I thought.

I rushed on over the little bridge, trying not to look

at the water: there were only fifteen steps to the house. "I will go on and begin," I said to myself, and I repeated the words over and over to myself. I did not know what I meant to do.

I was afraid of my future words and deeds: I felt they were such that I should remember them to the very end of my days.

I felt a stifling feeling about my heart: I could scarcely breathe. On, on to the bitter end!

I found Stebnitzius a few steps from the house on the open space into which all the alleys led, and where the carriage drove up. I was filled with a fiendish joy! He came up to me and said mockingly, "And what sort of game have you shot? Some species of night bird, I suppose?"

I interrupted him by seizing him by the hand. I felt inclined to strike him, to wound him: I was simply shaken with fury.

"Out with you!" I cried.

He looked quite surprised, and tried to draw his hand away, but he was not able. Never before had I so much rejoiced in my strength. With a sharp movement I crushed his fingers together. He cried out in a cowardly, whining voice. I was reminded of the hare's moaning.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, in a frightened voice. "Are you out of your mind?"

"Out with you!" I cried, crushing his hand more

heavily; "out with you, and don't be caught here again! I know all."

I hissed out these words into his ears, which was more effective than any striking could have been.

Then I took him by the collar like a dog, and literally threw him outside the gates. My strength seemed increased threefold. Had he offered any resistance, I would have struck him with the butt end of my gun.

But Stebnitzius disappeared into the darkness without one word. He probably thought this the safest course; he would have feared a duel.

When I was alone, a sigh of contentment escaped me. But suddenly I felt the increased pain in my heart. I must now go to my wife. There was no escaping; so I went into the house, while the wish within me grew stronger and stronger—the wish to go away as far as possible out of it all, that I might hide my shame.

"Where is my wife?" I asked the lackey when he relieved me of my gun and hunting pouch.

"With the young master."

The fact that she was with her son aggravated my anger. I imagined that she suspected the danger, and had tried to seek protection in Kolja's presence.

"We shall see," I said to myself, with a scornful smile, and went to the nursery.

The room was only lighted by one flickering light.

In the half darkness I saw my wife beside the child's bed.

When she saw me, she whispered, "Hush! he has just gone to sleep: the heat has exhausted him."

"Yes, yes," I murmured involuntarily; the atmosphere influenced me. "Come with me, come away quickly."

I took her by the hand, and led her to my study. She offered no resistance, and suspected nothing.

When we reached my room, I bade her sit down, and I struck a light.

My hands did not even tremble.

It was oppressively hot and sultry.

"What has happened?" she asked, when she saw how pale I was.

I did not answer at once. I did not know how to begin, or how I ought to begin. I looked at her, and noticed her sharp glances. I remembered I had always thought her eyes so truthful, and the remembrance was very painful.

"You ask me what has happened," I said in a cold voice, which sounded quite strange to myself. "Well, I have turned Stebnitzius out of the house."

My wife turned white.

"What do you mean?" she said, almost inaudibly, and without moving.

"I struck him, and hunted him away almost like a dog; you know why."

She was silent. Her face was still pale, and her eyelids quivered.

"You have betrayed me and deceived me, you dishonourable woman!" I cried, with increasing passion. I saw you both in the park. I saw you in each other's embrace. My gun was loaded, and—I did not kill you."

"Ah, had you only done so!" she moaned, "had you only done so!"

I let go of her hand; it gave me no pleasure to inflict physical pain upon her.

"Listen to me," I said, looking at her with hatred. "I do not know what I shall do with you, whether I shall turn you out of the house or not. I cannot make up my mind. If it were not for Kolja——. The sight of you is odious, insupportable to me. I thought you were the best woman on God's earth; now I know you to be the worst. I do not even wish to know if you have betrayed me to the fullest extent, or whether you only wished to do so. The thought and the deed are equally dishonourable and disgusting. Go, you liar, your presence is hateful to me!"

She rose and passed me with bowed head, and left the room.

I own at that moment I hoped she would either drown or poison herself.

Ghastly thoughts passed through my mind.

Five years have passed since then.

You stayed with us, and you noticed nothing. I forgave my wife, not from want of character, but because I considered it necessary and honourable not to rob Kolja of his mother.

For the child had no share in her guilt. Why should he share my grief? My heart is broken; but we only know it, my wife and I. My son knows nothing: he will walk in the right path of life in happy confidence. Should I have done better to kill my wife and to add a fresh sin to the one of which she was guilty? You understand why I did not kill her; you understand that it would have given me no relief to have done so. On the contrary, that moment would have become an eternity of remorse had I committed this deed, whereas it has remained but a moment covered over with the consoling hand of time. My wife has repented of her sin, has suffered much.

The Greeks say that not even the gods can alter the past. My past was irrevocable, but I should not have changed it by a deed of murder. The offended husband was able to forgive, because he was also a loving father. And have I the right to kill her because she wounded and betrayed me? Did she thereby forfeit her right to live? Was I her Creator? Can only that thing live which has not sinned against myself.

I did not kill her ; I forgave her. Had I killed her, I should have committed a contemptible crime : I should have destroyed my child's life, and should have inflicted an indelible stain on my character, and have made a martyr of my wife. Now, as it is, I am at peace.

Whose was the Blame?

BY

MRS. JAMES GREGOR

Whose was the Blame?

CHAPTER I

TWO ladies were seated in the arbour of a beautiful large garden, laid out in the old-fashioned style.

They had just come to the end of a book they were reading aloud. It now lay before them on the table—a mere unpretentious little pamphlet in a yellow cover. Nevertheless, it had not missed its aim, for the naturally calm, strong face of the younger woman, with its lofty brow and clear blue eyes, bore the traces of a powerful emotion, which seemed to have called up afresh an old pain that had long since been conquered and buried. She looked like one who, having long since ceased to struggle, is on the point of throwing off the self-imposed fetters which, as the years have passed on, have bound themselves more and more closely around a soul by nature so free, so bright, and so full of hope, striving to crush out all the vitality within.

She rose up and looked into the gentle, kindly face of the older woman, whose eyes were full of an inquiring interest, and she said, in a low and trembling voice,—

"I cannot speak of it, sister, but I will write of it for you and all those who may care to read, for all who are inclined, as you are, to accept the magnanimous dicta of the Prince. I will give you the answer —the answer of a woman—to the words of the Prince: 'Thou shalt do no murder.'

And now that we are reconciled, and that we have lived together three years, you may find in this answer a solution of much that was hard to understand in my past—that past during which you too, sister, looked upon me with scorn, and condemned me as others did. Methinks he has given but a poor solution if he alludes to the physical death. He has only looked into the heart of man through the green spectacles of hope."

CHAPTER II

YOU left home early, and therefore you know little of the years of my girlhood. I saw you last when I was nineteen years old.

I was a child, full of hope, courage, and love of life, putting forth claims to which I felt myself entitled—claims for an existence of inward happiness and satisfaction, of striving and reward—and all around this was shed the halo of endless love in the companionship of a husband, better, greater, nobler, than myself—and for that very reason dearer to my heart. I never laid any importance on mere outward circumstances. You know what my choice was, and you also know that I would cheerfully have shared a garret with the man I loved.

Yes, with the man one loved ; but we will come to this later.

I knew that my parents were very wealthy. I had been brought up carefully and lovingly ; I had learned willingly, and acquired a fair amount of knowledge ; moreover, I looked out with clear-

seeing eyes on all around me. But, alas! I imbibed the evil as well as the good.

For I was still very young when I began to recognise much that was very unlovely, and I perceived that the impression that life is beautiful, so gladly accepted by the youthful mind, was not one that could be permanent.

I often felt that I could see right into the heart of people, and while they met me with friendly words, I could see the bad, false, deceitful spirit that was lurking behind.

You know I was often blamed when young for being so sparing of words, so morose, and so shy of people, and how often I had to bear the comments of the following nature: "Don't look so gloomy, and don't talk such stupid, earnest stuff, or you will never gain any firm footing in your social circle."

I often felt terribly oppressed by the conventional folly, the lying and false words which were spoken, and bound to be spoken—so much so, that I was on the point of becoming pessimistic and hypochondriacal—that was because I was so absolutely lonely.

I do not know if you have ever had this feeling of loneliness: it is like a boundless, barren desert. To know that there is not one person in the whole world, among the countless numbers it contains, who understands you, who makes your interest his, whose heart beats in warm and tender sympathy with yours.

But this is love. I recognised that it was the love I sought. I sought it even as a child, though I did not then recognise the object of my search. The meaning only dawned upon me later, when I first felt this terrible loneliness.

It was the spring of the year—the trees, the plants the bushes, were so young, so beautiful, so full of life and scent.

It was Sunday afternoon, and the Promenade was crowded with noisy, merry people. I was walking alone, as I had wished to do, because I felt the need of thinking over many things oppressing my heart, and of much that was new to me—at least, in the form in which it now presented itself. I felt that there was no joy in it, for I knew, as soon as I had thought the matter out, I should have to bear yet another lost ideal to the grave, and lay it to rest in the quiet burial-ground of my heart. Of late they had died in rapid succession, the bright, kindly children of my heart. This mortality began when I was yet but a child ; but up to now, for each death there had been a new birth.

As I was walking along, I saw in my mind those little graves, and bethought me of the many tears that had been shed over them. I suddenly felt as if everything about me was sinking away from me, the beautiful spring, the merry people—nothing before, nothing behind, a feeling of endless nothingness.

"Anker warf, wo kein Hauch nehr weht,
Und der Marksteim der Schöpfung steht."*

And yet they were still there, the trees, the people the carriages with their ceaseless roll—yes, alas! they were there

But what did it all concern me? I was alone, quite alone. There was no fellow-creature who would have understood me in a few words, who would have taken me in his arms, and have said, in quieting and consoling tones, "Be still: I think, I feel, I suffer as you do. I know it all—we are one in heart; come to me. You will here find consolation and counsel when you are lonely."

Lonely, alas! I had never felt so lonely. I should never have had the feeling if I had known of one such person in the world; and though we had been separated by seas and mountains, it would have mattered little—our souls would have been as one.

But I knew of none. And yet, at this very hour, whilst I was burying an old ideal, I was giving birth to the greatest and most beautiful of all. So great, so glorious an ideal, that it seemed to comprise in itself all the others, which I had cherished and fostered, over which I had mourned, and which were nothing compared with this. They might all now perish without causing me lasting grief, if only this

* Schiller.

one remained untouched and unchanged in its spotless beauty and grandeur.

I now realized what love is: the cessation of loneliness and of selfishness.

When I went home, I felt a new being; I now knew what I ought to do and to seek in this world.

But I changed outwardly at this period also. All my feelings were clear and beautiful; never had I been so happy or so free.

Yes, life was beautiful—I knew it and felt it. How could it be otherwise, since Nature had given me a sensitive soul, and with it the possibility of reaching the high ideal within? I no longer saw in those about me so much that was ugly, superficial, and wrong. Everything seemed reversed, and more than once I said to myself, "There is some hidden meaning behind it all."

And I longed to find the meaning, and sought it as one might grains of gold. My acquaintances began to find me amusing, talkative, witty. They said I was in love, that was what they called it, and I said the same, although I knew well enough it was not the case.

What was it? I was quite clear about the matter, though not always; for instance, at first, as long as I was still seeking. But I had not to seek long; I soon discovered that I had made a mistake.

In society (where each man throws his best cloak

around him, not only the physical but the moral cloak) I received attentions from different men. They knew how to be sympathetic; and, as from a personal point of view I was a desirable match (for the exterior is always more important than the interior to the majority of people), many a one patched up his cloak, had it cut and trimmed with poetry. I was taken in by this sort of thing, and this was called being in love. But soon I began to spy a hole in the society cloak, a damaged place or seam where it had sprung open, and I looked through at the naked, empty soul which was often so smooth, so polished, and inane (though always very brilliant from its outer wrap), so that I had no curiosity to fathom any deeper.

The preliminary glance had sufficed, for just as the illusions I had cherished died gradually away before the realities of life, so in exact proportion did the ideal within me gain fresh life and strength every day.

This great ideal of love filled my whole soul, and was the motor of all. It was kept white and pure, unsoiled and fair, its polished surface unsullied by a breath. If this had happened, it would have been my ruin, for I could not have borne it. This ideal was the strength and object of my life, and the physical side of me would have received no other sustenance.

Later—ah, later, it was so! Fate had ordained it thus.

I did not know that one could be a corpse and yet live; it was only as a married woman that I made this experience.

CHAPTER III

ONE day I made the acquaintance of a man who seemed to me to be quite different from any one who had yet crossed my path.

His ideas were bold, grand, and far-reaching. He had already made some mark in the world, in spite of his youth, without, however, boasting about it.

At least, it seemed to me that where he did not hide the consciousness of his merit, he merely showed a justifiable pride. He was loved, esteemed, held in high consideration all round; he was, moreover, an amusing companion, and a thorough man of the world. Whenever he was of the party, there was laughter, merriment, and witty conversation.

He attracted me as he did all women; at least, in those days it appeared to me that all were in love with him.

I first met him at a ball (unfortunately, later on, it was only at these festivities that I had any opportunity of meeting him); but when I thought over the ball at night alone in my room, it appeared

to me an event which was destined to have a great influence over my life.

I never went to dances merely to amuse myself—dancing in itself gave me but slight pleasure: I went to see and to observe. It was only later, when I was a married woman, that I danced for the mere pleasure of it, and I attended balls with that object, also to forget and to seek distraction.

At this time, however, I had no wish to forget.

During the weeks which followed that eventful ball, I could not banish this man from my thoughts. I was constantly repeating over to myself the conversations we had together. Considering the occasion, we had talked a good deal, and the subject matter had been fairly serious. He appeared also to be seeking, and from the many conversations I had with him later on, I gathered that he was unhappy.

How did I come to that conclusion? Ah! how, indeed? The more I saw of him, the more intimately I conversed with him, the more I felt the impulse to help him. But, although, in spite of careful examinations, I could detect no flaw in the costly, genial society mantle he wore, nevertheless, I was a little troubled, and I felt a shrinking against which I struggled in vain.

I had a secret, silent struggle with myself in those days. I tried to avoid my new friend. I purposely

avoided one or two social festivities where I could be sure of meeting him.

It was as if my guardian angel had whispered to me, "Take care—he is too strong for thee."

And that was really the case. The gentle warning voice was drowned by the burst of joy in my heart—so joyless and loveless up to the present time.

"It is all real," my heart whispered joyously, "all this understanding of me, this fine feeling, this nobility of disposition, and, above all, my love for him is real—the love of soul for soul, the kindly reception of a lonely soul by another, that both may lead, in communion with each other, a beautiful, pure, and holy life." When I was more than usually penetrated by the conviction of some special failing of my own, I felt that his love was much too grand a gift from nature, and the thought came upon me with terror, that perhaps I might be a stumbling-block to his genius.

But then I thought: "No; he will raise me to his level. My soul will grow when brought under the influence of his, and the tired wings will be strengthened afresh, and bear me aloft into better, higher spheres." Alas! these were idle dreams.

"He loves you, child. Do you realize this?

"What his love is?" Ah, me! the mockery of it all.

I must really laugh outright while I write this;

but the laughter sounds as though something had broken within me, or as though the broken shreds were rattling in the icy wind.

Yes, indeed, something is broken ; once I thought all were broken. But a prince was to come—a prince good and kind, who should awaken what was slumbering within me, to all appearance dead

CHAPTER IV

I DID not at that time know the nature of his love for me. Although I had observed much, I did not then suspect the extent of the boundless hypocrisy which men allow themselves with impunity to exercise on women. I did not then know that men in a sense killed their wives before marriage—before even knowing them. Tolstoi has found the true expression of this in his "Kreutzer Sonata." I knew little of this ; I had a presentiment of it, but not that it was so general. I imagined it to exist in individual cases, and was to be excused, if not sanctified, by nature, love, and passion—the grievous shock to one's nature on discovering that the true marriage was an impossibility. I would have excused a false step under such circumstances. I would even have forgiven it in the man I idolized, the god of my pure ideal.

But my case was not such a one. The whole thing was sordid, low, and animal. He was like the hero of the "Kreutzer Sonata"—not much worse, but cer-

tainly no better than one taken from the common herd.

I had never known the "common herd," but I felt that his genius ought to have raised him. It will perhaps be said that my error lay in seeking so god-like a man.

But was I really seeking such a one? I have spent the latter part of my life in thinking that question out.

There was a time—the most terrible time of my life—nay, not of my life, for I was not living then, I was merely vegetating—when I believed that I was seeking a god, but there was no god. There existed only common, low, selfish human creatures, and I believed that I shared those attributes with them, and, what was worse than all, I saw that the man whom I believed to be fashioned of finer clay was also as they were. And I said to myself, "I have no right to complain; I am as mad as Don Quixote, who took a peasant for a knight and windmills for giants." All human beings are egoists, every one. It is not only impossible to find one who will sacrifice his soul for the well-being of another, but there is not one who will give up his physical comfort and his material well-being for his fellow-man.

First comes self, and others do not come into consideration at all if they are so foolish as not to look after themselves. "They are all lonely, as lonely as

I am," I said to myself, "but they do not analyze the amount of suffering they have to bear—they are happy. Why am I not happy?"

Nobody seemed to think it would be different; nobody seemed to think that I must be eventually happy after marriage. Yes, after marriage! after I had made a compact with that man—not an indissoluble alliance of soul, but a mere physical union.

Oh, God! oh, great bountiful Nature, how is such a thing possible?

How is it that the fairest, and purest, and holiest laws can be dragged in the mire?

The deadliest sins are those against Nature, and a marriage without love—without unselfish love, without the spiritual union of one human being with another—this is a sin against Nature. What could be more horrible than to allow such a relationship to hold good when one has recognised it to be unnatural?

One's whole life becomes nothing but one long falsehood. The woman who goes on living such a life with full consciousness of the fact, must feel a criminal, but, unlike him, she undergoes no degradation in the eyes of the world. On the contrary, people call her a good woman, an excellent wife. Even those who know the true circumstances of the case will say she is truly faithful and good, for although she does not love her husband, she continues

to look after him, to make his home comfortable, and to receive him with a joyful, happy face. Well, perhaps it may be a martyrdom, but, I fear, a martyrdom without a crown. A useless—nay, even a criminal martyrdom. How many thousands of people there are who, living in full knowledge of life, cling in a cowardly, slavish spirit to these barbarous customs! For, who made these customs? Not divine, reasonable Nature; there is no such thing in her wise provision.

It is human beings who made these laws, weak, narrow-minded creatures, who are afraid of themselves and of the animal nature which they cannot control. To that end Wisdom and Experience proceed to fence the animal in. But, ah, me! the mockery of it. The animal springs over the hedge when he is inclined. That does not affect morals in society, as long as it happens secretly, not openly, before the eyes of the world. No, it must be surrounded with lies and deceit; the fence, though useless, must be left intact. The human being who struggles against the animal nature, and fights it down, but whose soul cannot be kept back by any limit of man's making, who says, "I cannot keep the law. Oh that the human will that made it would restore my liberty—would restore our liberty, for we both suffer to become free individual human beings." How does it fare with such a one?

There is a separation, certainly—but it is difficult, if not impossible, allowed by law—with the mutual consent of the married couple, but stigmatized by the world. The woman is put outside the pale and pointed at, there is a stain on her honour; it is almost accounted as a crime that she is separated from her husband. She can no longer associate with her fellow-creatures as before: there is perpetual whispering and gossip about her. It is very rare that another good, honest fellow, who took pleasure in her society before, comes near her when he hears the words, "separated from her husband." Tolstoi looks upon the dissolution of marriage, even when it is sanctioned by law in the form of divorce, as absolutely criminal; he maintains that only once in life should a person enter into so close a relationship with another—never again, even though the first contract be not marriage in the eyes of the world. But I should like to know whether this stern judge of human feelings has ever tried to understand a woman's attitude in these matters. Does he really think that a woman's whole life must be fettered because, while young, innocent, and inexperienced, she entered upon marriage? Must she always discover her error when it is too late to remedy it? It is worse than hell! At least, so long as men have not reformed according to Tolstoi's models. But, alas! the oppressed sex must wait some time yet for the change. Ah, these men!—is it

not absurd that they should write books on the subject, showing how very good and noble and merciful they are when it occurs to them to say, "Thou shalt do no murder." Ask yourselves if this is true. "If only you had done it," says the poor unhappy wife of Galitzen's hero. Does not a man really feel this? Does he not know the meaning of that heartbreaking cry, "If only you had done it."

No, we women must explain it to you first; then perhaps you may understand it—perhaps not. You may possibly shake your heads, and say with a delicate, superior smile, "over-excitement of a fanciful woman."

But I know only too well that it is not so. I have felt it in my inmost soul. What the wife meant was this: "Oh, that you had taken all that remained of my real self as it was when I first saw you, loved you, and married you—to my destruction. You have long since taken all that was good and beautiful in me: why should you disdain what remains? Now I know your former life, I know what it was worth, and what you were pleased to call your love for me. I gave to you a love which was pure, beautiful and undivided, an all-embracing, all-sanctifying love, which you degraded and polluted and trampled in the dust. There were hours when you dragged me down to the level of your animal nature, and when I loathed you. Every time it seemed to me more

dreary and comfortless, until the life had completely gone from me. Can it be that I still live, or that there can be anything in me worth killing? If there be anything, I cannot see why you should be deprived of this pleasure. It cannot be your conscience which holds you back, since it did not prevent you from slaying what was best within me."

That was the meaning of her words—that the meaning of her sad eyes when she rose and went to the door with bowed head.

CHAPTER V

WHEN I recognised that the influence of the man was too strong for me to resist, and that therefore I was helplessly in his power, from the passionate love I bore him, I did not know that it was his cleverness and his experience that had gained the power over my mind; I did not know that it was an act of violence, of imprisonment, to which I was consenting, because I was blinded by my folly.

Yes, he was clever, and his mantle was magnificent; there was not the smallest hole or the tiniest rent to be discovered in any part of it, and it was draped so skilfully. From time to time artificially damaged places were displayed—faults that were quite apparent; but even the damaged spot seemed to have a costly foundation underneath.

"He is quite open about his faults," I said to myself; "and though I admit them to be faults, they are quite to be excused," and I got even to love them so that I could scarcely have done without them.

Then came the day when he asked me to be his

wife, and I consented. It was the moment for which I had longed day and night; but now that it had come, I felt as if no impression had been made upon me. I went joyfully to the fight, in spite of the warning voice of that unconscious, unawakened element within me. I had a struggle with my people, who were strongly opposed to my marriage with a poor man who was my social inferior.

But at that time I fought for my ideal.

We did not see much of each other just then. This was a misfortune, for had we had more opportunity of meeting each other before marriage, perchance the moment would have come, ere it was too late, when the magnificent drapery might have become displaced, and one glance might have sufficed.

It was only when the family opposition ceased, and my father, who saw the matter with clearer eyes than I, had died, that we had ample opportunity for meeting.

Then came a time when the faintest suspicion began to dawn upon me as to what it might look like under the mantle.

I know that one night, a deadly anxiety came over me, lest it should all be over—all a mere dream of the past. When he came to visit me on the following day, I showed my confidence by trying to explain to him the state of my feelings. He did not understand me, and was offended, affecting a certain

coldness in his manner. With much anxiety I sought to appease him, and he once more assumed the manner of a tender lover. Yes, he was tender, but utterly lacking in understanding, and I felt that our souls were quite apart.

I was as lonely as before—yes, even more so, for I had lost my own individuality. I felt during that time as if I were somebody else, and as if I knew nothing of my former self, of the hopes I had cherished, or of the yearnings I had gone through.

I tried to persuade myself that I was immeasurably happy.

I silenced the still, small voice within me, because I said it belied the truth. I even called it my fiend, partly because it was so painful to hear, and because it spoke the truth.

One is apt to call truth a fiend, because it so often tears the bandage ruthlessly from one's eyes—the bandage which is so pleasant, because it prevents us seeing what is unlovely.

One thing I could not deny, and it certainly caused me alarm, and that was, that I wearied in his society—I, who never felt the sensation of *ennui* when alone.

Dimetri says, on one occasion, in contrast to Tolstoi, "We did not weary of each other."

"*We*." No, he did not weary; but what about Nadine, the poor princess? I am firmly persuaded that at the time my *fiancé* did not notice it, because

he was under the spell of love, and with such love as his, weariness and irritation do not come into consideration, because it is not conceived possible that they can have anything to do with it.

It must not be supposed that I imagine now, or that I imagined then, that I was all "soul." I am only too conscious of the fact of how closely body and spirit are connected, and that we can only live by and through each other. I never sought a purely spiritual love, or one that did not require the presence of the lover; but the æsthetic feeling must sanctify all, the carnal love must spring from the spiritual. The former should only arise when the latter has been perfected.

To a pure-minded maiden, the presence of a lover is above all things to be desired. She longs for the warm, fervent look of love. (I discovered sometimes, with an inward shudder, that there was in his look desire, rather than love.)

She longs for his kiss, for the pressure of his hand. It is true that this is physical. What is this compared with the sensations of a man?

When a girl is wearied in the presence of the beloved one, that is truly a sorry matter. But I would pay no heed to the inward voice—it only prevailed at times, and whispered, "If he were not there, if you did not know him."

Then I bethought me of the magnificent mantle in which there was no rent, or of the damaged spots which only served to enhance the grandeur of the rest.

Yes, he was a splendid creature : it would be folly not to love him with my whole heart, and to sacrifice willingly all that I had hitherto known, loved, and possessed.

Alas ! he demanded the sacrifice. But I did not suspect that I must give up my ideal, that I was expected to kill the child of my heart. Had I known this, I would have killed the rest which was worthless ; but the knowledge only came by degrees. There is a strange quality in human beings which enables them to bear with calm fortitude any pain that is inflicted gradually, and for any length of time ; but if it fell upon them with one blow, they would be powerless to endure it ; they seem to have fallen into a lethargic sleep, as if the dull throbs of the padded hammer which fate lets fall on the petty everyday life deadened all the better, nobler thoughts and resolutions within them.

Many there are who never awaken from this sleep and these, after all, are the happiest. I mean in the common acceptation of the term. Thank God, I now recognise that in spite of all there is a great and lasting happiness which rises triumphantly above all misery. Thank Heaven I have passed the stage of

doubting the fact, and I shall cherish eternal and unalterable gratitude towards the man who taught me this, who proved it by the mere possibility of his existence. Those are the most to be pitied who awake from the sleep from time to time. Here I am reminded of the parson's wife in Kieland's story, who, having woke up suddenly one night, saw the whole of her past life lighted up by a sudden flash. She only said, "How sad, how very sad it all is!" She is now an old woman, who for a quarter of a century has lived a contented and regular life—having merged herself, her true individuality. And suddenly her former self appears before her, and says: "What have you done to me? When I was young, I was full of life; and now?" Then that former self seemed to revive and assert itself in all the strength it had possessed before fate had lulled it to sleep. The old woman regained for a few moments the feelings of thirty years ago, for those years that have been slumbered away do not count. But she soon sees her illusion, and that the time has really gone for ever. "Why do you weep?" says her husband. "You can surely have no cause." And yet she had true cause for sorrow, for she was bemoaning a dead thing. At that moment she was burying her real self, which had only awakened from sleep to die of terror.

Kieland shows here the true knowledge of a woman's heart.

CHAPTER VI

WE were married, and I gave myself up to the lethargic state without a struggle; and, although I was never entirely overcome by it, there was real danger during the first part of my married life of my succumbing entirely to that deadly sleep.

I had hurried on the marriage, because I dreaded the warning voice within me, and I thought it was the best means of reducing it to silence.

The ceremony was a beautiful and a solemn one, but when we stepped up to the altar through the long rows of relations and friends, it was as if a voice whispered to me, "This is all a theatrical show!"

And when I stood before the venerable parson, who I was told by the others gave a most edifying discourse, the same voice was still ringing in my ears, and I could think of nothing else; and yet I was not frivolous by nature—the padded hammer was beginning to do its work.

Thus we began life together; there was a terrible weight on my mind and a dull pain at my heart, but

I took it for anxiety about what was before me—the great change of my existence.

I have never been of an anxious or timid nature—fear of any kind up to this time was an entirely unknown feeling to me. I looked to my husband as my guide, my friend and protector, who should help me out of this sadness, out of the maze of my own vague thoughts, which were my worst enemies.

But, alas! the mantle had slipped, and I saw a hideous, bare bit of selfishness through the rent which I had thought to find a foundation of generosity. Nothing but selfishness, and the selfishness assumed such dimensions that it blinded his eyes, and prevented him from seeing the misery of his wife.

He made one or two attempts to cheer me with laughter, senseless jokes and explanations which showed no comprehension of the situation, and then he gave it up. The relationship soon resolved itself into this: I ought to be cheerful—it was my duty. I ought to adore him, and when he had time he would be graciously pleased occasionally to accept the adoration.

He seemed to think everything must be right, because it was his wish that it should be so, and my duty to make it.

I made another attempt to speak to him, and to explain what my real meaning had been. I began timidly and hesitatingly, for I felt uncertain of

myself, and inclined to think the whole thing was fancy.

I wanted to tell him what my ideal of love had been : the sharing of life, the cessation of loneness, the universal and perfect understanding between us.

He did not even let me finish, but his look betokened vexation : " This is all nonsense." He sent for a bottle of champagne, and tried to persuade me to drink it. He said I was not cheerful enough. We were on our wedding journey, and he wanted to get all the pleasure he could out of it.

The mantle was shifted more and more, and was often blown about by the wind of selfishness.

This momentary glance caused me such alarm that I hastily strove to forget what I had seen, and turned my attention in another direction.

The fair and beautiful ideal within me was fast fading away, and the mist which surrounded it was growing more and more dense. I no longer wished to see it ; I sought to put the whole thing out of my mind. I succeeded so completely after a while that I did not even feel a void in the place it had once occupied, though everything seemed a cold mockery.

I returned home, sick in body and mind.

" As I said farewell, as I said farewell,
My heart was heavy as lead ;
When I came back, when I came back,
All joy, all love was sped."

Yes, I was ill indeed, and gradually became worse. I lay for months in my mother's house in a state of torpor, taking no interest in anything. I only realized later on, when it was all over, how absolutely indifferent I had been to all that was passing around me. I believe that no possible event could have roused me from the state I was in. If my doctor had suddenly appeared before me, and had announced that I should die in the morning, I should have accepted the information with as much indifference as the ordering of a new prescription.

As my physical strength returned, I began to feel a little more of what was going on around me. I began to take a little interest in everyday matters, although my inner self had not yet awakened to life.

I believed my ideal was dead once and for all.

Nevertheless, after a while I made one or two efforts to follow what a sense of duty seemed to indicate as right. Whilst I was undergoing a cure in a foreign place, separated from my husband for some time, I strove afresh to cover with the gorgeous mantle the cold, selfish form of its owner.

I knew it would be no use, and yet I deceived myself for a while by trying to set up afresh the idol in my heart; but, alas! I had seen only too well that the feet were only of clay.

As I felt myself gaining strength, I longed for an object on which to expend the newly found energy;

and during the few weeks of separation from my husband, I succeeded in loving, and was happy in the thought that I had perhaps found something better than that which I had formerly sought. I even fell to laughing over my former ideal conception.

My husband had tried to make me understand that my former chaste and beautiful love was mere folly.

I tried during these few weeks to banish the remembrance of the first part of my married life: I strove to forget how little consideration these lords of creation think necessary to show towards their wives, and the shamelessness with which the chaste feelings of those wives are trampled upon.

I wished to give up all the ideas I had hitherto held on this subject as folly and illusion, and to adopt those of my husband as the only true and reasonable ones.

I strove to do this in all honesty, but I failed. I succeeded in developing a spurious sort of affection, and so thoroughly did I deceive myself for the moment, that I did not at first see that the whole thing was a counterfeit.

With this poor mistake and love in my heart, with a fund of honest resolutions, but bereft of all ideas and all poetical feeling, I returned at the end of my cure to my new home.

This was certainly not the realization of the dream I had once cherished—far from it. It was a sober

and miserable awakening from my dream ; but I was so changed myself that I was not conscious of this.

Nevertheless, there was an indescribable something which I could not throw off and which lay with a heavy weight on my soul. It was unbearable, but indefinable, and I had no wish to analyze it even to myself.

I fought courageously with myself : this I can truly say. If the physical and mental energy I spent over the struggle had been used in the furthering of a good cause, they would not have been exhausted.

When the time was over, and the strength and energy which had all been directed to myself were spent, then I recognised what power had lain in me, and how grand it would have been to have spent them, not on a useless struggle against myself, but in joining my forces with a true, strong, noble man, would have led me with his loving understanding in the right path ; but it was not so, alas !

I almost succeeded in absorbing myself in the everyday cares of life, asking for nothing and desiring nothing more, striving to be to my husband all that is most desirable for egoists—a good housewife, one who is merely there to make a pleasant life for him ; that is, to look after his material wants. As for mental needs, a woman must not trouble about that : she is too limited even to understand them.

While men press onwards to some high and lofty goal, while they are stimulated on all sides, while, in

one word they really live, a woman is fully occupied in creating a pleasant atmosphere for the man when he returns home. Nor does he trouble to inquire whether the petty, oft-recurring worries of the daily home life have left her any leisure to refresh her tired spirit with mental stimulant.

At the risk of incurring his highest displeasure, the wife must keep up a friendly countenance and assume a pleasant smile when her gracious lord returns; she must be witty and amusing, so that he may find recreation at home to compensate for any worries which may have occurred in the fulfilment of his daily task. They are even considered the best of their kind who yearn for this domestic refreshment. Many have not even time to look at their wives and give them an opportunity of displaying their wit and cheerfulness; they hurry immediately to clubs or some other place of amusement, to seek "distraction" as they call it. If they consider it necessary at all to offer an excuse, they do so by pleading the inability of their wives to entertain them in a sufficiently bright and pleasing manner. Poor wives! Nobody seems to consider how they have been worried during their day's work, or the longing they have for mental stimulant; but such a craving in a woman is simply ridiculous. There are some women whom nature has endowed with so contented a temperament that they seem to be quite happy in the present condition

of things. I have heard their husbands converse somewhat in the following strain :—

"When I have been actively employed in my business all day (the business of this man was of a varied and stimulating nature, not unoften interrupted by visits from merry friends, or chess matches in some restaurant or other), I demand on my return a merry, friendly wife, and a comfortable house. I could not endure a serious woman who would worry me with earnest questions. I see quite enough of the serious side of life. I want light entertainment, and it is the vocation of a woman to provide me with that."

Yes, that is their vocation—according to the idea of most men, especially German men. Men only really represent human beings or those worthy of consideration.

Women are, according to their social position, the servants, the toys, or the instruments of pleasure for these same men.

In rare cases of happy marriage, when the men are of finer nature, their wives are their consolation, their friends, a source of joy that makes them forget the cares of life. But they are always there in their relations to men, always there to make life easier, more comfortable and pleasant. They are created for men, and women must be satisfied with this idea, and be perfectly content and happy.

If they succeed in satisfying one of the lords of creation, their ambition ought to be realized.

A man never inquires as to how this is brought about. He rarely dreams of considering the individuality of his wife : he is far too high above her. He makes his friends and companions among his own sex : no woman could occupy that capacity.

"Why should she trouble herself about the serious side of life?" thinks the man. "Her one object should be to amuse herself and *me*."

What are the amusements which are considered fit and proper for women? There are women who have never desired anything better. For such they are sufficient (though one knows not whether with different education and other surroundings they might not have been capable of higher enjoyments). For others these pleasures act as a kind of deadening of their powers, and when they awake from their lethargy, they look upon them with disgust.

But they must be cheery at all hours of the day and night, bearing in mind that the sole object for which they have been created is to serve man in some way or other.

In no scale of creation does the male claim such mastery of the female as among human beings. The female serves, of course, to propagate her species ; but when she has done her duty by giving birth to her young, she has a separate and individual existence as

marked as that of the male; she is by no means his inferior; she is often endowed with keener intelligence, for in the struggle for existence and the maintenance of her species by protection of her progeny, she has often developed higher instincts than the male.

Amongst women the mental faculties are not originally weaker than among men — they have deteriorated for want of development.

The superior physical strength of man has been used to oppress woman; she has been relegated to lower spheres of work. Men make the laws, and exclude women from all the advantages which the spirit of progress is bringing to satisfy the growing needs of the human mind.

For centuries, by means of this brute strength, men have thwarted the mental development of women— and that is why her sex has remained behind: she has only been able to eat of the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. And what gigantic strength must lie in woman, if, in spite of all the obstacles surrounding her, she yet succeeds in making a way for herself through the paths of learning, and accomplishes such feats as set men agaping.

But this is a rare occurrence. The really intellectual women who have courted and gained renown are very few and far between. From this men have sought to prove that women in general are far less gifted than men.

Yes, great women are rare! But have you realized that they serve to prove to you, if only by one individual case, how great and overwhelming must be their power if they succeed in scaling the thorny wall—the bulwark of hindrances—which their intellectual superiors have put in their way? Have you considered this?

The majority of men never think at all of this. Why should they? Is it not far easier to go on in the time-honoured customs, to live cheerfully with one's wife, to have her ever at hand to minister to his comfort? And so it saves much trouble to adopt the theory of the intellectual weakness of women. Anything that goes beyond the limit they have set is a horror to them; they even look upon it as a crime if the woman claim an individual existence at all.

Thus the struggle towards higher life is made impossible by petty everyday duties, by vexation at every turn, which produce the same effects as the constant pin-pricks—they wear away the power of concentration, and eventually kill the finer feelings of the soul.

The mind gradually loses all vitality, youth, and freshness, and becomes incapable of looking at life as a whole. It is as if a layer of thin, fine dust had gradually, almost imperceptibly, floated down and shrouded all the fresh young feelings of the heart.

The husband notices nothing. He only perceives

that the wife is losing her charms—that she is growing tired, old, and unlovely—and is indifferent even towards her lord and master. He had not contemplated that when he honoured her by marrying her.

Nor she, indeed, either. All is so different from what she once imagined. She had dreamed of the community of life, of work, and the perfect union of two human beings with equal claims and rights. Is her conduct so monstrous and so horrible if the thought come to her that she is no longer bound, because the life she is forced to lead has no moral claim upon her, because she did not know—nay, she could not know—what that life could be when she took that marriage vow? True, the idea of secretly breaking her plighted vows may be to her more repellent than the prospect of continuing her present hateful existence, and affecting love she does not feel. But is it wrong to loosen such a tie? The law says No; but public opinion—that unstable voice (which we all most fear)—says assuredly, Yes.

In a marriage blessed with offspring the matter decides itself. For a woman who has given birth to children there is a great and sacred duty in bringing them up, and this duty is so beautiful and so elevating that it enables her to bear much that would be otherwise unendurable.

CHAPTER VII

A WOMAN has naturally a wonderful power of endurance, and she needs but a tiny ray of happiness to enable her to overcome the greatest difficulties—indeed, to make these difficulties appear as trifles which cannot hurt her soul. Children can give such true and real happiness.

I never had children, nor have I known the calmness and bliss which the society of these dear innocent creatures brings with it.

I fell ill about this time, and was worse than I had ever been. I had to lie in a reclining position for some years of my life.

I was obliged to give up my household duties, and to relinquish the supervision of the house. And yet my husband always turned to me when anything went wrong. The servants, as is the custom of ill-bred people, were rude and disrespectful—seeing that I was powerless, and could not deal with them.

I was very ill, and the doctor said I was not to excite myself—an order I would willingly have obeyed if possible.

My husband came into the sick room from time

to time, in order to fulfil the duty of inquiring after my health; but before I could answer these inquiries he proceeded to reproach me with one thing and another, and then ensued violent scenes.

I was terribly irritable at times. I had few visitors: I had come as a total stranger to the town, and had soon been confined to my room, so that my circle of acquaintances had scarcely been formed. My dear mother was, unfortunately, too far away; so that I seldom talked to any one except to my husband and the servants. It was a doleful time.

These are all trifles, I admit—nothing but trifles which it might have been seemly to pass over in silence, only my whole life was made up of such trifles.

I know that it is not pleasant reading; one feels the dull, heavy prose of everyday life, which means to most of us untold annoyance. And this is a poor substitute for the thrilling excitement of a tragic fate which appeals to our pity and admiration. But, alas! I cannot offer this, and I crave pardon if the recital of my minor woes is wearisome.

Yes! it was hard to lie there day after day and year after year without being able to foresee any change in the condition of things; it was hard to have nobody near with whom to exchange a friendly greeting, and to be hourly in dread of some insolent speech from the mouths of my inferiors, or of the un-

feeling behaviour of him who ought to have been my best protector and friend. My strength was ebbing, and I felt, as it were, on the edge of a volcano, for I never knew what the next moment might bring forth, and whether some time or other words would be spoken which would compel me to leave the house.

I scarcely knew whether or not I provoked my husband to these dreadful utterances. If any one had dared in former times to address one such word to me, I should have looked upon it as a deadly offence.

And now I must needs hear them from the mouth of one from whom I ought to have heard nothing but words of love, who ought to have sheltered me from the unkind attacks of others. Yes, they came in quick succession, and they entered into my soul like so many poisoned arrows, and the poison entered into my whole being, and destroyed all that had still a remnant of vitality within me.

My courage was shattered. Now and again I made a feeble effort—a fresh start, as it were—but I soon broke down, as if the very sap of life were destroyed. All was dead and barren—and my faith gone.

Ah! if he had only not killed the ideal of my life! If he had not dragged it in the dust and trampled upon it!

I do not know how I lived through that time; but I survived—physically, at least.

As my physical strength returned, I began to seek refuge in books. I tried to construct a system of philosophy on the ruins of my past life. I read and pondered, and tried to banish all thought of self. But this I could not do, and at the bottom of my heart I never really wished to do it—the consoling words of the old classical writers could afford me no protection against myself. But as the interest and understanding of my old teachers came back, I began to feel fresh life within me. The pure and euphonious language acted upon me as a mild and soothing, yet potent, charm, and the power of divine perfection made its influence felt upon me as of yore. But the music of those voices was interrupted by the dull, sad echoing of my own lonely, passionless heart.

"All is vanity and lies—even those lofty ideas; poetry is but a puppet, gorgeously dressed, but stuffed with straw.

I was no longer capable of feeling or understanding. I flung away the books I had loved so dearly, and rushed out into Nature's wild and free expanse.

Could she save me, and give me back what I had lost?

But Nature said: "Thou hast sinned against me. All other sins can be expiated and forgiven, but not so with those committed against me."

She was a cruel mother to me, this same Nature whom I had loved from my childhood upwards. She

drove me to this sin, and I could not escape it, because it was now veiled under the name of Duty. If one only recognised what is Duty (that divine daughter of the gods). She is good, and holy, and pure. Thrice happy he who always knows where to seek her, and from whose paths he never goes astray. But eternally cursed is he who does not recognise her, and who sins against thee, great holy Mother Nature.

For true duty and obedience to nature ought never to clash.

I dreamed a dream, a passing dream,
The vision fled too fleetly,
And cruel Life will punish me
For dreaming all too sweetly.

O Dream, thou liest on my heart,
To earth my thoughts depressing;
My earlier aspirations all
With thy dead weight oppressing.

In that brief dream no grain of truth,
All lies, all blear illusion!
I dreamed in loving arms to find
The key to Life's confusion.

Afar, methought a glimmering light
Of bliss for me was shining;
But all I found was cruel Life
New wounds with old combining.

When Nature first my being wrought,
And manifold contrived me,
Of hope, through love, to reach to bliss,
She had not quite deprived me.

A cruel mother thou to me
Hast been, O Nature, surely;
Do not thine other children rest
Upon thy breast securely?

Thou gav'st a heart with richest love
Filled full to overflowing;
That heart condemn'st to loneliness,
No kindred heart bestowing.

Ah, loneliness within man's soul;
Grim word, our joy's undoing!
Alone amid the press of men,
Or lonely past reviewing!

I'm thus from real life exiled,
Condemned to lonely dreaming.
Ah, must I, Life, in truth unknown,
Content me with Life's seeming!

Ye Powers of Nature, hear my cry!
Of those by you created,
Give me but one to be mine own,
Let this lone heart be mated!

—*E. Tribe.*

Yes, Nature, thy child wails and calls to Heaven, but Nature pays no heed, for she is a stern, inexorable judge. Is he my true husband, this man with whom I live, but whom I do not love? Have I realized that Nature has so constituted human beings that they choose each other in marriage?

And I pretend to love, pretend it to the whole world, because men are mad enough to force this lie upon me as a duty—force me to turn my beautiful righteous life into one vast lie.

Life is only given once to each person to obey the holy laws of duty and nature.

But did not Nature bestow love upon me, that sacred burden which makes us all forget ourselves, and brave every sacrifice? Did she not instil into me the longing for a union with another person, and prompt me with despair at the absolute loneliness of the soul—which impels it to go forth to seek a fellow-soul? That was the initial error. If I had not recognised this so clearly, if I had acted unconsciously, as so many have done, then I might be forgiven ; but as it was, I sinned against the sacred claims of nature and morality.

Not that miscalled morality invented by an erring and easily deceived humanity, but a heavenly morality which Nature has placed in the pure instinct or conscience of man, which continues to flourish if not stifled by custom and education, and which rises up above the abuses of human laws.

I knew even then that it was the weight of guilt which was pressing so heavily upon me, and hindered every attempt of the soul to soar to higher things, and hence sprang up the doubt in my mind as to whether the demands of morality could be

obeyed, or whether the ideal I had felt, and known, and loved, could ever be attained. But now I know it can exist, and he who taught me this was and is my guardian angel. The thought of him makes me better, and recalls me to duty, right, and life ; it bids me act, and dream no longer. I thank thee from the bottom of my heart. Thou hast ceased to live, but thou livest in my heart, and in the hearts of all who have felt thy influence.

CHAPTER VIII

I SAW him frequently and for long together before I made his acquaintance. I was struck each time with the remarkable head and the whole personality of the man. His slightest action foretokened individuality and character. I could in no way explain why he attracted me so greatly. I realized that he differed in every way from the people with whom I was brought into contact, but I could not account for the peculiar and personal sympathy with which he inspired me. At that time my critical faculties were much too keen, and my state of mind too indifferent, to lay much value on any unconscious feeling of sympathy.

After an unexpected meeting with him, I could not prevent my thoughts from dwelling on this event. I felt in a measure compelled to notice him, though I tried to persuade myself the only difference between him and other men was the cut of his mantle. So I tried to forget him, and for a time I succeeded. Then one day I made his acquaintance. It was on the occasion of a charitable entertainment, a truly

magnificent display, in which beauty, generosity, humour and wit vied with one another to render the whole undertaking a brilliant success.

All these qualities were on the surface, and hid the ugly and selfish, envious and wicked feelings which only inexperienced and ill-bred people allowed to peep through when a fold of the mantle became displaced. Of such people it was said, They are not properly in society—they are diamonds, it is true, but rough and unpolished ones. Diamonds they are not; they are merely burnt cinders. Few know this, and those who do, conceal their knowledge. Men are very cunning: with one hand they wash the other snowy white.

I met my new acquaintance at this entertainment. I was standing in the bow of the window, partly hidden by the crowd. I saw them all, and I saw myself also and my mantle of deceit. I was seized with horror at myself. How willingly would I have thrown this selfsame mantle aside! but I could not, for so much that was unlovely would have been brought to light. "It would be more honest," whispered my conscience; and just at that moment he stood before me.

He gazed at me earnestly with his dark grey eyes, as he introduced himself to me, in a low, distinct, and somewhat foreign accent.

After making a few remarks on the society, the

acting, and the dancing, he asked me if I would be so kind as to make him acquainted with some of the ladies. "I should feel under such an obligation," he added. "It is at best difficult for foreigners to feel at home." The words were said in the gentlest of intonations, and his eyes beamed with kindliness. I noticed that he had many friends and acquaintances, and had therefore no need of my good offices ; but he had instinctively felt my loneliness, and had come to me asking a favour to conceal his kind intentions. I noticed soon that it was not only the outward loneliness he had seen, but that he had read into my inmost soul, and had seen what had so far been invisible to every other human being—namely, that I was standing absolutely alone. It was a similar feeling in him which made him understand my condition of mind.

He fetched chairs, and we sat close together in the bow window. First we spoke of indifferent things, as is customary between people who have only just become acquainted. It was astonishing how his mere presence calmed me. I never felt the same with any other person. My eyes were fascinated with the peculiar shape of his head and the loftiness of his forehead. I noticed the predominance of the reasoning and benevolent faculties over the sensuous. I noticed the clear-cut profile, the slightly aquiline nose, the beautiful mouth, with small refined lips, and

the somewhat decided chin. It was an essentially clever face.

"Have you ever studied phrenology?" The question had only presented itself to my thoughts, but the outward expression was quite involuntary. He turned his pale, thoughtful face towards me; it was lighted up by a bright and kindly smile. "Yes," he answered quietly. And now, almost unconsciously, we dropped into a conversation, which, considering how little we knew of one another, led far into the region of sentiment and introspection.

For once I completely forgot I was talking to a man, and a man who was a complete stranger to me. I had dropped my usual attitude of observation, and my habit of looking for the holes in the society cloak. I had forgotten to hide my own feelings, and to draw the cloak about me which served to conceal them.

It seemed like speaking to myself, like meditating in one's own soul, and as if new means and ways were occurring to me of understanding myself and others. At moments I fancied some one was taking me by the hand, and drawing me gently away from the false path into which my vanity and selfishness had led me, showing with gentle and kindly voice how to retrace my steps and begin a fresh trial. I forgot everything else about me—every outside impression seemed to have faded away, my eyes were closed to

the outer world, and I saw nothing but the clear grey eyes, which seemed to be looking into my very soul. I scarcely noticed that I was speaking myself, and indeed that any conversation was being held at all. I seemed to be gazing at the great problem of life, which had hitherto seemed insoluble, in quite a new light.

There was something so soothing and consoling in his manner that there seemed fresh hope of my life proving more satisfactory, if built afresh on the foundations of the new thoughts that gradually filled my mind.

A loud jarring laugh close to my ears awoke me from my dream. I knew the tone and the voice only too well. Suddenly the bright ball-room, with its crowd of merry, moving people, appeared before me, and just before me stood my husband, with his usual self-conscious smile. R—— rose from his chair to greet him. My husband returned his greeting in a somewhat negligent fashion peculiar to himself, which jarred upon me because of its familiarity.

"By Jove! what a serious conversation you have been having! My wife has evidently wandered once again into the regions of philosophy. Pray accept my thanks for the patience you have displayed. Come, it is time to go home," he added, turning to me; "the carriage is there. And you," he said,

playfully tapping R—— on the shoulder, "you must make up for lost time by having a good vigorous dance with the pretty girls."

I felt the colour rush into my cheeks; I only dared to cast a passing glance at R—— as I bowed slightly to him. He seemed to me to be changed, confused in his manner, and as if he had not clearly heard what was said. He spoke suddenly, as if the German tongue gave him great difficulty. He then bowed to me in the most cordial way, and took leave of my husband.

I left the room on my husband's arm, who was stopped and surrounded by his acquaintances on his way out. I was accosted in the hall by a friendly old uncle of mine.

"You look as serious as if the evening's amusement had bored you terribly," he said, taking my chin in his hand and looking down into my face.

I felt the observing look of my husband behind his glasses, and the mocking shrug of his shoulders. "You must put that down to philosophy, uncle," he said.

"Philosophy! What a strange woman to go to a ball to talk philosophy."

"Yes, and to bore other people with it too."

"Ah, if they choose to submit to that sort of thing, that is their own affair," said my uncle, holding up his forefinger, and then he disappeared.

We went out into the cold, frosty night, and our steps resounded on the pavement of the quiet street. Neither of us spoke a word while he handed me into the carriage.

My husband looked gloomy and bored; he sat there thinking over his own affairs as usual, humming an opera air. I leant back in my corner, with a feeling as if the moon and stars were shining for me alone, and something which I had long thought was beginning to stir within me, to throw off its dead lethargic slumber, and to rise to new life. I realized this, and lost in these dreams, followed with my eyes a constellation which shone out and disappeared again at every turn the carriage took.

When we arrived home, my husband opened the door with his latchkey, and wished me good-night.

"Are you not coming in too?" I asked, in astonishment.

"No; I am going back to the ball, to have a glass of wine with a few of my friends. Your society wearies me. You have certainly done a good day's work in boring one man pretty thoroughly by the nonsense you talked all the evening. It's more than I can stand—my manners won't bear the strain. Poor fellow! I pity him," and laughing loudly at his own wit, he went his way.

The heavy iron door closed upon him with a loud, creaking sound.

I stood there without moving, and listening to the sound of his footsteps as they died away in the night.

Bored—that was the only idea that penetrated my brain. I do not know how long I stood in the dark hall after all was quiet outside. Tears streamed down from closed eyes, and ran down my cheeks. Suddenly I saw two grey eyes looking into mine, full of kindness and sympathy, and I stretched out my arms to the empty air. "I am grateful when I think you are in the world," I said. "Beside a life such as yours everything seems small and indifferent, and everything seems easy to bear."

And now I suddenly realized what had made him so different from other people—why everything else had escaped my memory when I was with him; yes, even the consciousness of his presence.

It was because there was no gilding or sham about him—none of the fine, noble qualities with which other men live to adorn themselves; he was a simple, true man, with no wish to "assume the virtues though he had them not." He was by nature modest and quiet, nor was he bent upon producing any particularly favourable opinion. He was observing and full of understanding—without exercising any harsh judgment, and without being at all conscious of his own worth.

To him it was a natural thing to do his duty. He recognised his own faults, and felt his human weak-

ness ; he knew what it had cost him to become master of himself, and to attain to the power of self-control he had now acquired.

A man without a mantle to conceal his real self. What a phenomenon! Everything about him was real, even to the courtly, polished, society manner which was so attractive.

The consideration he naturally showed for all those about him, the charitable opinion he formed of them, as well as the respectful attitude he adopted towards them, were not merely the natural outcome of his good bringing up, but rather due to his sympathy and understanding for those around him.

The knowledge and comprehension of this man's character were as a revelation, nay, as a redemption from the living grave and eternal damnation. I went slowly upstairs in the dark, and undressed as if it were a dream. I was dead tired—more tired than I had ever felt before, for I had gone through more in those two hours than in the whole of my former existence.

The next morning when I awoke in my bed, the whole thing seemed a sort of dream. Beside me lay the man to whom I belonged, and to whom I must belong all my life, because I had erred at the outset.

I bent over him, and looked him in the face. How different, how absolutely different from the man

whose acquaintance I had made the night before! He was the exact opposite in every way. "I will bring no accusation against him," I thought; "he is quite satisfied with himself, and in his special way he has done good work. The fault lay in my choosing him."

So I lay there and looked upon him with no feeling of hatred in my heart. Nay, for the first time for a long while I even felt a little sympathy for him, for I no longer suffered from the stab which he had given my heart, and which, as I thought, had killed my ideal, since I had felt that the ideal was yet capable of life, as if it had found the great Redeemer for whom it had waited since the lonely hour of its birth.

The Redeemer had appeared, and was greater than my wildest dreams had imagined.

And I fell to thinking that my husband had expected something different from his married life than what I had been able to give him, and was certainly not happy.

How did he come to choose me for his wife? Alas! at this moment, with the gentle, kindly voice of that other man in my ears, I sought what nevertheless I had already recognised, namely—I was a rich heiress, and he had considered me a desirable match.

Ah, yes! It all came back to me, and I rose with

a deep sigh : he had done me so grievous a wrong that he could never make amends.

I felt all at once as if I were stifled, or as if I could not endure the atmosphere of the house one moment longer. I must have air, and at any price I wished to take a long walk, to refresh myself and collect my forces ; for it seemed there lay before me a task which would demand all my strength.

It was one of those cold, wintry days on which one seems to feel better and freer than usual, for it is as if the clear, cold wintry air acted as a purifying spirit upon the mind. One has the feeling that in leaving the dull, over-heated rooms, you leave behind the heaviness that weighs down the mind and hinders the power of a quiet and just train of thought.

My life seemed to have acquired a new strength, and a spring of youthful courage had sprung up within me, demanding some object on which to expend its strength.

Ah! and I was so young still! I returned to the house to fetch my skates. I thought the physical exercise would be good for me, and I walked quickly over the firm path of snow glittering in the rays of the cold winter sun.

My glance fell on the white branches of the trees, bathed in a soft rosy light, which took the tenderest and strangest forms against the blue background of the sky. I drank in the poetical beauty of the day—

the glorious view of the country, broken by hills and clumps of trees, and enclosed in the distance by the towers and roofs of a far-off village. The black raven hopped over the rosy snow, and flew away croaking at my approach. I loved to see the great wide expanse of country buried in the snow, and to revel in the quiet nature from which all traces of human life are banished from the nonce.

Life looks so beautiful from afar off. How peaceful and idyllic is that snowy village sparkling in the sun, with the picturesque outlines of its roofs and the gently curling smoke of the chimneys!

But when you come close, what is to be seen?—dirt, misery, hunger and cold. Is it not so with everything?

Was it so with the man, the remembrance of whom was still so clear in my mind?

Alas! hideous Doubt—my deadliest foe, that had once striven to dispel the most cherished and treasured sensations of my childhood, and which, by the experience of the last years, had acquired such a terrible mastery over me! And now it sprang up afresh, with its cautious, feeling fingers, seeking to tear down the beautiful new vision in my soul, before fate with its rough grasp should dash it down as a false mirror.

I resisted, and strove to protect my new treasure; but Doubt laughed at me, and said—"Fool! have you

not been sufficiently wounded by the sharp pieces these broken mirrors leave behind, and which have pierced your very soul? Must you now put up another —larger, more beautiful, more deceiving than ever? When Fate breaks it up, the pieces will hurt—they will tear your flesh and wound you to death, and you will sink back into the daily, barren, vegetating existence without hope of salvation—worse than hell itself."

Hell, hell! the word dinned itself into my ears, and yet I continued to resist the weary Doubt which sought to remove the image from me, before it could be dashed to pieces and pierce my heart.

Then came another voice, which called itself Duty, Custom, Right: "Yes, you must tear this image from your heart, from the place your husband alone should occupy."

"Yes, yes," I murmured, with gnawing anxiety at my heart—"I will strive indeed."

I felt as if some one held me at the throat. I stood still and looked out into the distance, and above me was the pure air. I stretched out my arm, and said,—

"Help me, Nature, ah, help me. Thou art holy, great, perfect. Thou hast nothing to do with the petty idea of human beings; they stretch out bold hands to thee, and strive to drag thee down into these petty, distorted paths. But they take thy sacred name in vain, and thou lookest down on them, and

laughest at the folly of thine own children. Help me, Nature, and teach me to obey thy laws, and keep me from turning against thee. Oh that I had ever obeyed thee! but, alas! I did not do so; for the false morality which has been learnt as a child, and which has been handed down from generation to generation, is too deeply engraven on the mind—namely, the morality which condemns as sin what is good and holy."

Thou hast even bid us love one another, because thou hast said that through love alone one becomes great and noble. But fidelity without love is monstrous and against nature.

One would almost think that I was advocating what the so-called realists call "free love"—a feeling which, by the bye, is no longer free. This school of thought goes against nature, out of which they have made a hideous caricature.

Nature is Divine and spotless, and she abhors the chaining of two together who cannot love one another.

I know a man whose mere existence gives me a higher and wider conception of human greatness, one who can serve as a moral support—against my cares, against the weakness of my life—the mere thought of whom made me better, and drew me back to what was right. Let me not lose hold of him, but let me thank him with all my heart for his coming, and love

him without the power of my being. But morality insists on the destruction of a love like this. It must be vanished from the heart, and with it must go the best and loftiest human feelings—all that makes life worth living. And this because at a time when consciousness and sense of responsibility were undeveloped a thoughtless, youthful promise gave body and soul in lifelong pledge. The soul has long since broken its bonds, and escaped. The material union, though disowned with abhorrence by the soul, remains as before, and morality calls this faithfulness. Is it not a sin and a shame? I did not see this all so clearly on that wintry morning, but I felt some consolation come into my soul from breathing in the great, pure air of nature, and my conscience, which had gone astray in the maze of modern morality, was somewhat quieted and strengthened.

CHAPTER IX

AFTER a few steps, I turned sharply round the corner; a dazzling sheet of ice lay in front of me, well swept and fenced in, provided with skates and ready helpers for all the pleasures of skating.

An ice carnival was to be held that afternoon. At such a comparatively early hour the place was almost empty of visitors. I only discovered at the extreme end of the pond a dark, slender form gliding about on the ice in graceful circles and figures.

Now he turned round and began to skate back in a beautiful regular motion. A strange anxiety crept into my heart. I knew who he was, although it was too far off to identify him. For a moment the idea occurred to me to turn back before he should have recognised me, and yet that seemed a physical impossibility; it was as if my feet hung as lead, and as if I must stand here to the end of my life.

He came nearer and nearer without appearing to notice that there was any living creature near except the man in attendance. I never saw any one go over the ice in such a manner. The movements were so

wide and free, the lines so pure, there was nothing that betrayed any striving after effect.

He recalled to my memory an eagle I had once seen in the Alpine heights as it sank slowly down with outspread wings and scarcely perceptible movement.

I was still standing on the edge of a pond only fifty steps away. "Shall I put on your skates, miss?" said a rough nasal voice, whilst a dirty hand was thrust out towards me.

I started, and looked into the man's red face; his fingers had already taken possession of my skates, and he was hastening along in the firm belief that I was following him down to the edge. I believe, had I not thus been compelled, I should not have moved from the spot. I began to skate with a beating heart, as if I were committing some horrible crime. My first attempt was poor and tottering, this being the natural consequence of my long illness. I felt very insecure, and suddenly the ice seemed to be giving way under my feet; in a sudden fit of physical weakness I looked round me for a resting-place.

He was skating at some distance, but just now he appeared to have noticed his fellow-skater, and to feel by instinct that she needed help.

With the swiftness of an arrow he came to me. My look was rivetted upon him, and I noticed he maintained the regularity of his movements in spite

of their swiftness; I did not notice the ice beneath me was bending and cracking.

"Come away from that spot," he cried, whilst continuing to skate; "it is not safe."

I made an awkward movement, and with a loud burst the ice gave way under me. He was beside me in a moment with outstretched arms. I felt the strength with which he dragged me out; my movement had been a stumbling and involuntary one, and to right myself I was forced to cling to him. He dragged me backwards with both hands, and landed me safely on the firm part of the ice.

When I was once in safety, on seeing who I was, he raised his hat with courteous greeting, and said, "I must apologise for my method of proceeding. I am afraid I have frightened you, but the spot was dangerous."

He held out his hand, and asked me how I was after last evening, and then offered me his help in skating.

"But you are so skilful and I so awkward, I should only hinder you, I am sure," I answered, and wished to stop.

"Not at all. I could help you until you have got into practice again. One always feels stiff and strange at first, don't you think?"

I looked at his graceful, agile form, and wondered how he could talk about being stiff. He laughed,

as if he read my thoughts. "There is so much ice at R—— that I have had frequent opportunity from a child," he said, and we glided off together.

"Have you skated much?"

"I? Oh, no. The doctor forbade it."

"Have you been ill?"

"Not exactly ill, but I coughed a good deal; the coughing has returned for the last few months."

"Then you ought not to skate."

"Oh, no," he laughed. The laugh sounded harsh and bitter, and was followed by a fit of coughing. "Oh, no, I have no time to be ill. I have to harden myself to all outside influences, or else I should not be able to do anything."

"And what do you think of doing?" I was almost frightened at my own question. I might appear indiscreet, considering the shortness of our acquaintanceship; but it was almost an involuntary question, inspired by the intense interest I felt in this man's idea of "doing."

"Do you mean during life?" he said, looking at me earnestly—"my duty?"

I said nothing. The word duty had sounded strange to me coming from his lips, because (unlike myself) he seemed to know where that duty lay, and he had succeeded in giving an expressive tone to a word which is so often abused by most people. The words seemed to sum up the whole man. Yes, to

mean anything, the word must be used in that way. Oh, that his life might be spared to do that duty! My glance fell on the tall and almost alarmingly slight figure. I noticed that he stooped somewhat, and that his face was thin and pale; his large, clear eyes had a far-off, dreamy look. We glided on together. He led me admirably, and sustained me with his strong protecting hand.

If only this hand could have led me through life, I would never have grown tired of it. I would have grasped it as the hand of a true comrade. I would have shared joy and sorrow with him, and have helped him with sympathy and understanding to accomplish his life's duty.

We spoke but little: all my thoughts seemed concentrated in the sensation that I was not alone, that I had a protector, helper, and trusty friend by my side.

It was a delightful feeling of security, as if no person in the world could do me any harm. I did not stop to reflect that it was a transient thing. I lived in the present, and for the moment the past died out of memory.

I knew now that there was no illusion. The image would never be dashed in pieces; it would last till death, and could never be effaced, even though the man himself should be no longer in this life. Doubt had lost its power, and made no attempt to regain it.

During the next few weeks we did not happen to meet. I went away some time to stay with my mother, who, not feeling well, desired to have me with her. It was well for me that I should thus be able to face things clearly and pull myself together. I passed a summary judgment on myself, and analyzed all my feelings and sensations, so that I might know exactly what I might allow myself to do. I recognised, indeed, that I must tear this image out, even though I tore my heart out with it, unless I could honestly say that the intercourse with him made me better, nobler, purer, in thought, feeling, and deed. I owed this to my own self-respect, but I found nothing in the love but was healthy and helpful. Since the day I made his acquaintance, and even during the weeks I had not seen him, I felt fresher and more energetic in all my undertakings; it seemed to me as if new life were pulsating through my veins; I seemed to be freed from some oppressing weight. I went more joyfully about my daily work, and got through it with a greater ease and skill. I did it without reluctance, for it seemed as if the little threads of everyday life were all woven into one great whole, or as if they were fragments that I had to reconstruct into a holy temple—the Temple of Duty. When I thought of R——, it was only because I had chosen him as an example, and wished to be worthy of him. Example—yes,

he was so indeed, and will ever be as long as I am able to think. I can never hear that gentle, clear voice again, nor will those serious eyes rest upon me again. But he will remain as a standard to me whenever life presents any element of doubt as to what is good and right. I shall then try to imagine what judgment he would have passed. For during the few months of our acquaintance, and on the few occasions we were alone, we had discussed many subjects, the treatment of which came back to me in after days.

CHAPTER X

BUT I must tell you the facts in their natural order, somewhat after the manner of Prince Dimetri. But mine is not so easy to tell as that of the Prince from the arrival of Stebnitzius to the moment when he was actually driven away, and the Princess was only outwardly allowed to retain the position of wife. My story is not so simple. It relates to thoughts rather than deeds—indeed, it is only concerned with the region of thought; but are not thoughts as evil as deeds?

Yes, but no inquiry is made into the nature of thoughts, whether one is made purer by love, whether a great, clever man can help one to attain by love what would have been impossible without.

The judgment is passed on the following ground: you have loved another man in place of your husband; this constitutes sin. Must one throw aside all that is great and good in one? must one steel one's heart against every ennobling tendency, and to give way to selfishness and to the lower passions, and even love them if they happen to be the self-same passions of a husband chosen in blind ignorance?

Why are great and noble men given to us? Do they only exist for themselves, only as ornaments to the human race? Shall we close our ears to their words, which penetrate to our understanding and force their way to our hearts, and shut out from our eyes this pure and unselfish act? Are we to turn from them as if they were evil, simply because we have erred in the choice of a husband, and because our love for the other might degenerate into forbidden passion? Shall we have no profit out of what is good, and shall we, from moral reasons, turn from what is true morality, and turn to what is distinctly immoral? that is, the common life with a man whom we do not love, and who lets us sink deeper and deeper, until, according to Tolstoi's theories, we are ruined body and soul?

Is not this unnatural and almost idiotic? I have never been able to understand it, nor do I think I ever shall; and therefore, on moral grounds, I have taken the liberty of setting aside the so-called morality of society.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER R——'s return from B——, I often met him out in society or at concerts. Though we had little opportunity of being alone and holding quiet conversation, I was never with him without feeling that I had become more intimately acquainted with him. One scene in the theatre will never be effaced from my memory. He was sitting in front of me, so that I could catch his profile, and the study of his thoughtful head was more interesting to me than the acting on the stage. During the next interval he came into our box. He greeted me courteously, and shook hands with my husband, with whom he entered into conversation. The two men discussed matters of ordinary town talk. R—— strove now and again to draw me into the conversation, and asked my opinion on one point or another. But my husband monopolized the conversation, and would not allow me to utter a word, nor had R—— a much better chance. He was very witty in his own special line, and always knew the latest things out. R—— stood before him, looking at him in the quiet way which

was peculiar to him. When suddenly my husband button-holed him, and whispered something into his ear.

It must have been something highly diverting, but, according to his views, quite unfit for my ears, for, after having said it, he tried to compose his face, and to resist the temptation of roaring with laughter. A sudden flush showed on the pale face of his listener, betokening shame and anger. He looked hastily at me, to see whether I had understood anything.

I had heard nothing, but I glanced inquiringly at him. He turned quickly away with a strange look, half of scorn, half of anger; he then took a hasty leave, and went out.

My husband looked after him, somewhat taken aback; but with a cynical smile he said,—

"What a bore that man is! He is as innocent as a nun, in spite of all his experience of life. No German behaves in that fashion. He really is slow."

Then followed a long, unconcealed yawn. I felt I was being mastered by my anger.

"If more men were possessed of a tenth part of his dignity and goodness, society would certainly profit by the change," I said, in a low voice.

He cast a hasty side glance upon me, and said, with a low, mocking laugh,—

"Ah! the wind blows in that direction. So we

have lost our heart to that dull spectre, have we? Well, by all means, as far as I am concerned, I am not jealous of a monk."

I remained seated a few moments longer, then such a horror came upon me that I stood up without saying a word, and went home in the middle of an act.

It was one of those moments in life in which the piteousness and misery of my lot was so forcibly borne in upon me. I could not help contrasting these two men.

When my husband returned home late—I had retired earlier—there was a renewal of one of those dreadful scenes in which he mocked at me in a wild and violent manner, whilst I, in sharp and unsparing language, gave him my opinion of what lay under his beautifying cloak.

It was one of those terrible nights when the ground seemed to give way under my feet. Passions like hot lava streams that have burst their bonds rushed in upon me and choked my very existence.

But this mood passed over as so many like moods had done before, leaving me in a state of dull apathy. Cowardice once more asserted its sway; there was the old fear of coming to a decision my life was as empty and cheerless as the barren, scorched fields over which the burning lava has passed.

I went out the next day oppressed by this feeling,

thinking of nothing, and sensible of nothing, with no remembrance of all that had passed during the last few weeks, my courage damped, and all sense of duty crushed within me.

Turning round the street corner, I suddenly stood before R——. He bowed courteously, and stood aside to let me pass. Whilst hurrying on, I had the feeling of being dragged back by an invisible hand, as if I had something to say to him, something for which I ought to ask forgiveness.

I turned round, and noticed that he was standing still looking after me, and we walked slowly along towards one another until we stood face to face. He bowed again, with a questioning look upon his face.

"I must apologise," I said, trying to look past him up the street, which at that moment was almost empty, "for the offence I fear my husband gave you last night."

"Offence to me? Oh, no; I only feared"—he spoke with diffidence, as if he dreaded lest his words should produce involuntarily a wrong effect upon me—"I only feared lest the words should have affected you painfully if you had understood."

He looked very grave, and I felt that his clear eyes rested upon me with almost anxious solicitude; it was as if he were trying to look into my soul. I felt the deep interest he took in me, and the feeling brought with it great anxiety and deep joy. He

seemed to tremble at the thought of discovering it himself, a feeling of which his conscience could not approve. Never had a stranger made so delicate and tactful an attempt to express a friendly sympathy without words.

I had been wounded in my inmost soul, cast down and helpless. I had gone out in a state of complete indifference towards the world, and this because I thought everybody was in the same attitude towards me. It was a hideously selfish state, I knew; but I felt like one who is about to rid himself of this life because there is no more joy to be found in it. This is selfishness, but it is the selfishness of despair; and despair, which is a kind of delirium, is in some manner to be excused.

Now, for the first time in my life, I had met a fellow-creature who took interest in me, and strove to find out what I thought on certain points—seeking to know whether I took a wise interest in life, and whether mine was a pure, unpolished nature. That is what he wished to know.

We stood opposite to one another, each observing the other. Then I said, "Though I have not grasped your full meaning, I thank you with all my heart."

When I had uttered these words, I was overcome with anxiety that I should have spoken too strongly, but he understood my meaning perfectly.

And yet perhaps he did not fully understand my

gratitude, because he could not see my inward loneliness and sadness.

He stretched a hand out, and I placed mine in it without a word. There was a smile on his lips as he bowed and took his leave.

Goldne Sonne, leih mir deine schönsten Strahlen.
Lege sie zum Dank aufs Jovis Thron,
Denn ich bin arm und stumm.

So strong was the feeling within me that I was able to receive my husband with friendliness and kindness, and so considerate was I to him that he gave me casually to understand how much he congratulated himself on having set me right the evening before.

"You are really becoming quite reasonable," he said; "and it is high time, too."

Even these remarks had no effect upon me. It only aroused in me pity for the man who could make them, but there was no pain in the thought that the man, although he was my husband, had never striven with care and love to possess my soul as well as my body; there was not even a regret, because I knew now that there was another who loved my soul and understood it.

Therein lies the wrong. It is wrong, sinful; nay, it even amounts to adultery when one has said "I will," though the word may be as fatal as a life-long prison—one is sold, body and soul. Yes; for one

has no further right to dispose of one's soul. If one does it, it is a punishable offence, and nothing can excuse it. Is that the meaning of it, or not?

Nor is it even to be excused when the husband scorns the possession of his wife's soul, nor cares to effect an exchange which he ought to do; or if he forgets its very existence, and casts it on one side as a useless appendage to the body which he does possess.

Is this soul nevertheless condemned to cleave for ever to his, to wait and hunger for the crumbs which fall from the lord's table—as a sparing nourishment for the devouring hunger for understanding and love?

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Are they blessed or cursed? There comes a point when both these consequences are true. There is a state when a father, condemned to starve to death in a prison, is capable of devouring his own children, and just in the same way the soul consumes its own ideals when it is in such a state of hunger; for in the delirium and despair the ideal of fidelity can perish.

I knew that I was not living up to my ideal of fidelity when I wished to give my soul to another lest it should perish of hunger; for I was now hard on myself, and did not shirk the agony of analyzing every thought to its source.

But the mind was pure. I wished to save the

better part of me. I wanted to escape from the cloud of dry, poisonous dust which seemed to be slowly sifting down on to my life.

Protect me, oh good and true fellow-man. Take me in your arms as a friend; take me to your heart. "Thou shalt not quench the smoking flax." This is what I thought, and I acted accordingly. He became my spiritual support, and an indispensable factor in my life.

CHAPTER XII

I OFTEN saw him and talked to him. For the most part we met in society, where, however, we had few opportunities of quiet conversation without being noticed. Nor was this necessary. Often when I was discouraged and sad, one look from those bright, earnest eyes—a gentle, friendly smile, a warm pressure of his hand when we met, to soothe me—that was quite sufficient to give me a sense of security and protection. I never lost the feeling that in every instance where I might meet him I could always turn to him. When I went with my husband to an "at home," I had the feeling that I belonged to R——, not to my lawful spouse, who, by the bye, from the time we entered the room together, took absolutely no notice of me whatever.

If confidence and indifference are one, my husband could certainly lay claim to the former quality.

He never sought to separate us, or to come between us, or watch when he saw R—— come to me and greet me, which he did in a simple, quiet, and almost reserved manner.

Our intercourse in society consisted chiefly in a

consciousness of each other's presence. When one or other of us made a remark, an understanding look passed between us. We did not definitely seek expression of the good understanding between us: it expressed itself naturally, almost unconsciously. Each instinctively tried to read the countenance of the other, and each found it an easy task.

I remember one evening there had been a specially merry party assembled together. We had played at forfeits and other games, and had amused ourselves just like children. There had been much laughter of a simple, childish nature. I have always cared for those games which seem to have no special object, but are entirely without malice or *arrière-pensée*.

He also had been one of the party; but his quiet, reserved manner never left him, though he always managed to introduce something without making himself the centre of attraction. It was his excessive modesty which prevented him from bringing forward his own personality, or from using any opportunity of becoming a favourite of society. He took the esteem of his elders and the boundless admiration of the younger people in his usual quiet way, without losing his friendly, modest bearing, or without presuming in any way on the feelings he inspired. Indeed, I think he was conscious of something more than a general kindly disposition towards himself, which he did his best to maintain.

Such people require time before they can be known. It is not given to every one to see and feel the pleasant and beneficent influence of such a calm, quiet nature, which is sometimes put down as tiresome and unsympathetic, because one fails to recognise how much restlessness has to be fought down before that quiet of mind can be attained which is a mirror reflecting in its smooth and polished surface the interest and feelings of one's fellow-creatures, for which one thus acquires sympathy and understanding. The warm, pulsating life is held in check, and although this nature has penetrated with kind and tender feelings into the heart of things, yet its tactful modesty will not allow it to take one step or to show any more interest than is desired—it shrinks from coming as a stranger or an outsider into a circle that was already formed; but if help is required, such a nature is always ready to give it.

I have myself heard R—— spoken of as cold and insensible—he whose quick, broad feelings served as a guide to his clear understanding. His motto was "Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner."

We came across each other several times during the games that evening. Once as a punishment, because we had forgotten to redeem our forfeits. He gave me a side glance, and said, in his usual hearty, warm manner,—

"To-day you are really merry, are you not? A

human being has such an unconquerable, healthy capacity for being merry, and it is this that gives the real beauty to life."

"Yes," I answered, "there must be an enormous latent capacity for happiness in man. At the slightest provocation an atom is set in motion, and can move a hundredweight from the conscience as if it were a feather. It is a pity that the effect is not felt long, for the weight seems heavier than before; yes, indeed, one becomes perhaps conscious of it for the first time."

"Ah!" he said pensively, "a great deal depends on a man's will. The more I think, the more I learn of life and begin to understand its significance, the more I am conscious of the beauty of life. I have arrived at the stage of contentment."

"But do you think that one's enjoyment is keener through philosophy?"

"I do not call it philosophy, but thinking. When you come to know clearly what existence is, you come also to the enjoyment of it. How much is unnoticed, unseen, unappreciated, of what Nature offers us in so full and rich a measure, because we hurry by with closed eyes, and because we think those organs of sight are given to us for no other purpose than to direct them to some forbidden, unattainable, and often imaginary good, without which our deluded minds consider life not to be worth

living. There are harmless, light, childlike, yet none the less complete joys, and we should retain as long as possible the faculty of appreciating these; but this faculty is destroyed by too much analysis. If we came to philosophize, as you express it, on what we are doing at this moment, there would be little to take hold of; indeed, our occupation might almost seem to border on the ridiculous."

Reasonable people should have the faculty of so controlling these reflections, and, indeed, their whole intellect, that they should have the power of checking its activity whenever it threatens to disturb their enjoyment of simple, childlike, unintellectual pleasures.

"But now it is our turn." He stood up, and was soon again laughing and joking among the merry folk.

A few moments later he came back, heated and breathless, to his place beside me. He coughed a little, and looked paler than usual. I heard him pant for breath, and when in the course of the game I had to hold my hand in his, I noticed how feverish the pulse was.

He noticed my anxious look, and smiled in an absent manner.

"Are you ill?" I asked, in a low voice.

"No, not ill. I have had a cold for some time, but am better now. This really means nothing."

He smiled again, but somewhat sadly this time.

We could not speak to one another, because the game went on and we were separated. I followed him with my eyes. When he sat down again at some distance from me, I heard the dry, hollow cough once again. I could not see him, and I was seized with an indescribable anxiety which I could not explain.

He had never appeared robust, but as he had always taken part in everything, and as I had heard other men more than once extol his activity, his power of work and his marvellous industry, I had never thought that he could be ill, and he had disputed the fact himself; nevertheless, there was a new weight at my heart, and not even the new strength which happiness had given me was sufficient to remove it.

My name was called once, then a second time, and a third time. I must have sat there buried in thought.

"Is anything the matter?" A loud, sharp voice grated in my ears. My husband was looking indignantly at me because of the disturbance to the game.

His vanity and pride were evidently wounded because his wife had been the object of laughter.

"No," I said, trying to smile too.

"Perhaps she is composing poetry," sniggled a former school friend in a low voice.

Now the laughter was louder than ever. But I was

not long the object of it, for R—— stood up at the opposite side of the circle with a new magic trick of the most comical kind.

My husband looked in that direction, and joined in the laughter in a manner which was usual with him—not a hearty laugh, but with open mouth, as if swallowing the real laugh. But the attention was withdrawn from me, and nobody remembered me or my want of attention in the preceding game, in which I had been obliged to take part.

"If you must assume a Medusa face that freezes one's laughter, let us go home," hissed my husband close to my ear, in a voice of suppressed rage.

I rose up, for I felt I must get away from him. I could not endure my husband's reproaches; it was beyond my strength. I ran up to where R—— was standing, and stepped close to his side, as if I wished to see what he was doing. It was an involuntary movement, and one seeking protection.

"Don't stand so near," shouted the others, "or else there is little merit in finding out how it is done."

I was conscious of a hasty glance of love and understanding.

"No," he said; "now we are going to do something else, but I shall want help. Would you stand here?" he added to me, passing me some of the cards and a little box, which I had to show the company was perfectly empty.

I felt his kindly care of me ; I knew he had understood, and that, to a certain extent, he had taken me under his protection. He wanted to occupy me and distract my thoughts.

"I am so sorry," he said, when we were able later on to have a few moments' quiet talk—"I am so sorry that our 'philosophy' after all has disturbed your pleasure in these innocent amusements. It was my fault : pray forgive me."

"No, it was not the philosophy, but a new weight which the natural capacity for happiness is not strong enough to move."

His eyes rested questioningly upon me. I looked into the beautiful spiritual face—every feature was so well known to me, and each one told of greatness and goodness ; he seemed so noble, so refined, so different from other men. Nothing which suggested low or common thoughts had ever entered there ; if ever such thoughts had suggested themselves during the years of his youth, they had been combated, torn up by the roots, dashed from him. I knew the gentle smile so well that played about the corners of his lips ; it was half sad, and yet there was a new faint suggestion of happiness in it because there was here one full of sorrow and anxiety for the lonely stranger whose home was so far away.

We were standing in the ante-room preparing to

leave the party, and as my husband was busy discussing some new idea with one of his business friends, he had not time to take much notice of me, so that it was R—— who put my wraps about me and took me to the carriage.

"Good-night." His warm hand rested for a moment in mine, then my husband stepped in, and we drove away. I began to think matters over in my mind, and wondered why I had blushed and gone away without begging him to see a doctor, to follow the latter's prescriptions, and to spare himself as much as possible by not over-exerting his powers in his studies and learned pursuits.

And I had been silent, and blushed as if I were ashamed, as if I had committed some evil deed.

"Why should not I help a fellow-creature, and warn him?"

I recalled his smile, which had become changed by the suggestion of happiness, and I felt that here, sitting in the dark beside my silent and apparently sleeping spouse, I blushed afresh. Yes, he had been happy. Though for some time we had lived in a whirl of society, and though we had seldom been alone together, yet we had managed to know each what the other was doing. It is true we did not often speak, but a glance was often sufficient to establish a perfect understanding between us. We had never told each other by word or sign how much

we were to one another; but we both knew it—we were bound to know it. We should not otherwise have had such intuitive knowledge of each other. Why, then, should I have blushed when I thought of the difference in his smile? and why should I blush because he felt this and it brought him happiness? How strange the human mind is, I thought; how it shrinks from the consciousness of what has long existed!

"I wonder why you have such a predilection for pale, sick people," said my husband suddenly, in a giggling, mocking tone.

I started out of my thoughts; my heart beat, but not from an evil conscience. I was only startled physically by the harsh tone in which the question had been put; a shock had come to me at the word "sick."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Whom do I mean? Do ask a less foolish question. Do you think I am blind? By the bye, he is a very clever fellow," he added, in a half-gracious, half-condescending tone; "he expressed some very good ideas just now. Well!" he drawled out after a while, though I had asked no questions, for I suddenly failed to understand what he was driving at.

He had always spoken of him in a slighting tone. Whence this sudden praise?

"What do you mean?" I asked, in my turn.

"Always that question, 'What do you mean?' By the bye, I told him to come and visit me."

"And do you imagine he will respond to this summons?"

"Bah! I am not always so uncivil as you choose to think me. He said he would certainly not delay to call as soon as he had your permission to do so. "Ha! you won't be long issuing the invitation, eh?"

A mocking giggle followed these words. I felt that I grew alternately hot and cold, and betwixt fear and joy I scarcely knew what to say. My husband did not press for an answer, for the carriage had just stopped before the house. He opened the door, and, without shutting it behind him, went straight to his own room, leaving me to find my way in the dark.

What could be his intentions in asking R—— to visit at our house? Was he attracted by R——'s cool understanding and his learning, or did he wish to see how I would receive the intimation? Now the question arose in my mind as to what was to be done.

As I lay in the dark, during the quiet of the night, I seemed to foresee clearly what must happen if I requested R—— to call. I knew that till I put the request personally he would not set foot in my house.

Yes, I saw and recognised it all with infinite joy,

and yet at the same time I felt in my heart as if the whole of my past life were blotted out, and as if my present life were filled with only one image.

Our intercourse for the future would be of a more intimate and private nature. We would be able to read together and talk over everything in a quiet and undisturbed way. I knew it all, as if I were the small piece of metal that has ventured into too close proximity with the all-powerful magnet. I already felt the magnetic power tearing at my heart, and I resolved to proffer my request.

He had left the matter in my hands, with his usual delicacy and tact. There was a gentle note of warning in this act of his. I ought to have lent a listening ear—I could easily have made an excuse for so doing. He would then have paid a visit to my husband which I could have ignored. But I tried to persuade myself that I must invite him, that it was a mere question of politeness, of no more signification than what I had often done before in inviting any young man to call upon us.

I was in such a hurry about the matter that I rose earlier than usual, wrote to him begging him to come on the following evening, and I took the note to the post myself.

"Where have you been?" asked my husband, when I came down to breakfast later on.

"I have been to post a letter."

He asked no further questions, and it was only in the evening that I remarked casually, looking up from the newspaper,—

"I suppose you have no objection to R—— taking tea with us to-morrow?"

He sniggered ironically.

"It is really very amiable of you to do me the favour."

Then he returned to his newspaper, and soon forgot all around him, including his wife.

On the following morning I received a card from R——, regretting that a previous engagement would prevent his coming that evening, and at the usual calling hour, the following day, he appeared in person.

My husband was not at home, and I received him alone. I felt quite a different relation towards him. I could not speak openly nor look him in the face, and it seemed quite impossible to treat him as I had done for the past few months.

He also appeared stiffer, more formal and reserved, than usual, though he was as courteous as ever.

He expressed his regret at having to refuse my invitation, and said that he had come to express that regret in person.

We both expressed our regret that my husband was out, and then ensued a silence during which we endeavoured to pick up the thread of the conversation. Suddenly we looked one another in the face.

We both looked uneasy and constrained because we both knew we were lying and playing a part. For the first time we stood in an equivocal and unconventional position to one another—we both had tightly fastened up the mantle which we had never feared to display openly up to the present time.

We looked at each other and blushed, but we did not turn away our glances from each other; our eyes looked deep into each other's for some moments: he saw to the depth of my soul, and I knew that he would find but little there of any worth, but his was as pure as a well of pure water. And yet I could not bear his gaze, because it was full of endless love, sympathy, and understanding. I have never let anybody else thus read into my heart, because I knew that nobody else could gaze so unselfishly and forgetfully, and with so loving an understanding. Others would not have so covered up my failings with the mantle of charity from the outside world, or have striven gently to improve them; they would have dragged them out laughing before the gaze of the public, and have rejoiced to have found me no better than they were themselves, and they would thus have stifled and crushed those germs of good which had not yet put forth, because there was no good soil, instead of fostering and cherishing them as he did until they had grown into tall, strong trees, which in their turn would give shelter to others.

He took my hand in his.

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart," he said slowly, and his full, rich voice trembled a little. The tone was still vibrating in my heart when the door closed upon him. Tears welled up into my eyes, and I threw myself on a couch, weeping bitterly.

Why had fate willed it thus? We both realized only too keenly its cruel, inexorable power—more keenly than if we had made our full confession in words.

At present we could give each other mutual support and deep consolation; but how would it be later? Ah! if he had gone away then and never returned!

My husband came home an hour later. I was sitting before my writing table, trying to appear interested over a book.

> "Oppose not Fate's decree,
> Nor seek thy lot to shun;
> Accepted in humility,
> 'Twill lead you kindly on."

I opened at this passage by chance, and Goethe's dear, well-known words were before me.

The card which R—— had sent in to announce his visit was lying on the table.

My husband picked it up, and threw it down again.

"Well, your morning has been pleasantly filled up."

I did not move. He walked up and down the room once or twice. I thought he was still thinking over the morning visit, and I trembled at what he might be going to say. Then suddenly he began to speak about the clothes which must be put in order for a journey, and that very evening he went away for an indefinite period.

During the time he was away I only saw R—— at other people's houses.

When I met him, he always showed the same keen consideration for my feelings; indeed, it seemed to me as if he wished to give me more protection and support than before, because I was alone. Among the circle of people we frequented there were many men with whom I greatly objected to dance, and whose acquaintance was extremely unpleasant to me. He knew how to keep these people away from me with unusual tact, or if he could not do this, he remained and took part in the conversation. If we had an opportunity of speaking privately, our conversation always turned on serious things. I do not think he quite realized how each of his quiet words sank into my heart, and what a balm to my wounded sensibilities was his great, clear conception of life, which seemed to give to my soul fresh and healthy power of endurance. I reminded him of what he had once said: "Life is beautiful, and I am content. Nature is great, pure, and beautiful, and I have always been

inclined to appreciation: it is this that makes my happiness."

"But human beings destroy the good: that is what is so painful," I answered.

"Do not believe that," he said. "They cannot do so: it is only the outward effect. They cannot touch the spotless nature of what is really true and great. Are not you of the same opinion?"

He looked at me lovingly and kindly, and I felt the comfort he had wished to give me, and I answered by taking his hand gently in mine, to which he responded with a gentle pressure.

His pale face did not bear the print of happiness upon it; but then, he had not said he was happy; he had only said he was content, and he had never looked discontented. He seemed to be able to bear the greatest pain in the full consciousness of it, but also with the deepest resignation which told of the happiness of triumph.

Six weeks afterwards my husband returned suddenly one evening. Without having announced his arrival by so much as a line, he entered my room.

"Good-evening," I said, in as friendly a tone as I could muster.

"Good-evening," he answered, without even offering me his hand. He began to give orders, and to complain that this and that were not as it should be. Then he took no further notice of me, and during supper he

spoke little, but read through the letters and papers which had come for him.

We had absolutely nothing to say to each other; we had not missed one another during our long separation, and the meeting seemed all too soon. I pictured to myself how different it would have been if R—— had sat there in his place and returned to his rightful position after an absence of six weeks. Ah! Heavens! how different it all would have been!

I know the thought was a wrong one, but I admit to having had it, and I do not wish to idealize or suppress anything; I would like to speak the whole truth, just as Galitzin makes his hero say what he conceived to be true from his point of view. I wish to show simply the reverse of the medal.

About a week after my husband's return I reminded him that he had not yet returned R——'s call.

He turned his head half round, and I shall never forget the lowering, suspicious look he cast on me.

"Did he help to pass away the time and console the grass-widow?"

His mocking language was sharper, more uncivil than usual—indeed, it was almost diabolical.

"I have only seen him occasionally out in society," I answered, as quietly as I could. I wished at all costs to avert one of those shameful and degrading

word skirmishes, lowering to both, and only emphasizing our hatred. Although R—— could neither see nor hear what passed, his soul had become so much one with my own that I should have felt that I disgraced him if I had not acted in his absence as I should have wished to do had he been present.

"Ha, ha!" laughed my husband as he went out of the room. I felt the blood rise in my cheeks; I hid my face in my hands, and wept bitterly. I was seized with an indescribable longing to rush to the man I loved, to tell him all that was in my heart, and to seek protection—yes, to seek protection from my husband and myself.

If he had been present, I know that I would have fallen into his arms, and entreated him to remain with me, and never to leave me.

But fortunately he was not there.

He was in the town, in his own home, and to have sought him there would have needed a sharper stimulant of despair.

But this moment of culpable weakness—for all weakness is worthy of blame—passed over.

One learns with time to bear many things which at first appeared absolutely beyond one's strength.

Ah, that slow, stifling torture, that mortal anguish which yet does not kill—always another turn to the rack, always a deeper humiliation in one's own eyes, and hope and happiness ever on the wane, until the

light of life seems utterly extinguished, and there is no prospect of freedom or change of any kind left.

Fate holds us with iron hands, and permits not a glance either side.

Ah, it is a living burial indeed!

It came upon me thus one night as I lay alone, looking with open eyes into the empty darkness. I felt it all creeping upon me. I shuddered at the dim consciousness of it within me as I felt its icy cold power.

A terror of my own existence seized me. I stood, as it were, outside of myself, and saw myself lying there in the dark. It was as if I stood beside a corpse, but a corpse with life and breath in it. Buried alive—buried alive! All that makes life worth living lost to me and to others; nothing left but a breathing corpse! Terror was upon me during that night. I felt it was a truth, and no folly or hallucination—a real, living truth.

I struck a light, and, as I often did during sleepless nights, I read the clear, calm meditations of Marcus Aurelius on the things of the world—that old sage whose eyes have so long since closed in death, and yet who will ever live.

By the help of that clear mind I succeeded in forgetting myself—the spectre of my dead self passed away, and I looked out at the world through the wise old eyes of Marcus Aurelius.

But the horrible feeling of being buried alive returned later on, and I could not always allay it as during that night. If I had lived alone, and had never gone out among people, and had never seen warm life pulsating around. But as it was I was shut out from all; my life was empty and barren—I had neither goal nor purpose. I was a dead and useless member of society, without being able to call the man to my side who might have saved me—the only one who could help me, who could drag me out from under the ruins of my former self, which were covering me as a grave.

When I thought of him now, I always thought of the mocking laughter of my husband.

There was a mixture of anxiety in the feeling, not for him, but on my own account, which made me pause when the thought passed through my mind, prompted by the cry of despair during those moments of abandonment,—

"Help me, dear friend."

My blood boiled when I thought of that laughter. I did not dare mention R——'s name, though day after day passed without my seeing him. The social entertainments were over. As the season came to an end, I sought him in the theatre, at concerts, in the streets. "I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth." I sought him, but I found

him not. I did not dare to ask for news of him from others, for I noticed that though he had given no sort of opportunities for so doing, society, thick-skinned as it usually appears to be, had managed to display marvellous fine sight in discovering a certain mysterious relationship between us.

My attention had been drawn to it when I found myself the subject of half-derisive smiles and passing remarks.

Some weeks after my husband's return I heard a quite unknown voice behind me at the theatre say in French,—

"Do you know that R—— is leaving?"

"Leaving so suddenly?" answered another unknown voice.

"Yes, in a few weeks. He is better. By the bye, I saw him to-day; he looks ill and much pulled down. It was only an hour since he had received the news from his Government, which seems to have excited him afresh. The doctor had warned him against all excitement, which he said was bad for him."

I felt as if I had been turned to stone.

I longed to look behind me, but I could not move my head. I longed—ah, what did I really long for? I could frame no definite wish. I remained motionless, without seeing or hearing. I got up at the end of the piece, and walked slowly home. "Ill," and "going away"—those were, I think, the only two

words in the dictionary of my brain, and I could have used no others. I went straight to my room, and lay down on my bed, where I remained motionless the whole night through with open eyes, thinking of nothing. It was beyond my powers of thought to conceive how it would fare with me when he was gone away for ever.

Then came the dawn of day, and with it the cheery, shining winter's sun, taking away the terrible spell which had hung about me all night; its bright rays lit up the bare grey branches, which stretched out their stiff arms as if pleading to be heard, but pleading in vain.

Then came the other thoughts like a storm upon me. "O God! only not to have to think and to endure!"

More comfortless than ever—now the hopeless burial has come, the end of all!

"But why now? No, I will seek him. I must see him, even if it costs me my life; for if death comes, I am quite indifferent to it," I said to myself.

I think I was very near to madness. My brain was on fire, and my fingers trembled as I took my hat to go out. Where was I going? To him—to my sick friend, who would so soon be lost to me.

Then—slow, firm steps came up the stairs. I heard the maid open the door of the reception-room, and ask some one to sit down, as her mistress was at home.

"I do not wish to intrude at so early an hour, but tell Madame I have some communication to make to her."

My heart stood still; I could scarcely breathe. The sound of his voice had stilled all the wild, excited, defiant feelings that had arisen in me. I was perfectly calm; it was as if a gentle hand touched me. I felt that while near him I could do nothing rash or foolish—in fact, that I could not have a weak, much less a wicked moment.

I believe, in thinking the matter over since, that this was the secret of my love for him, the reason why I deferred to his judgment, because his influence was in the direction of what was best and most elevating, and repelled all that was weak and small.

I opened the door and went into the room, inwardly excited, but outwardly calm. He was standing at the furthest of the three windows. I caught his profile in sharp outline. He did not appear to have noticed my entrance into the room. His head was slightly bent, and he was playing absently with the tassels of the curtain. I stepped noiselessly on the soft carpet until I came to where he was standing. I laid my hand upon his arm.

"Have you been ill, my friend?"

My voice trembled, but I was surprised myself at the quiet intonation with which I said this, as if I had stolen a tone from his own voice.

He started slightly, and stretching out his hand, he turned his pale, earnest face towards me.

The eyes seemed larger and more deeply set in the pale, thin face—and their expression was so sad.

"Yes, I have been ill."

He must have read the shock and terror on my face. I glanced involuntarily at the transparent fingers, which I held in mine as if I could never let them go again.

The old kindly smile played for a moment round his mouth.

"But I am better now."

"You are going away?"

I think this was merely a cry clothed in these few words.

He looked closely at me with the deep understanding which he only could feel. He led me to a couch, took a chair, and sat right in front of me.

"Yes, I am going away, and my object in coming here——," he stammered—there was a veiled sound in his voice which is often the case with invalids. "I felt I must tell you this in person."

"I knew of it," I said, feeling that my self-control was beginning to give way.

"Then I have come too late after all; I wanted you to hear of it from me, but I could not come out sooner."

"R——!" I cried. Terror seized upon me, and I fell on my knees before him.

He raised up my head, and I looked into his pale, suffering face.

A slight sigh escaped him, and he bent forward and kissed me long and passionately.

Thou great Unknown, who dwellest in man and hast given them the sole path by which human souls can communicate, so that the terrible loneliness to which the human soul is otherwise condemned is taken away—Thou, who in moments such as these, sacred and pure, hast shown them how to find this way—Thou knowest that kiss was a sacred one between two whose souls are pure—a kiss such as is given only once in a life-time; but many there are who live without ever knowing such a moment.

He raised me up and stood before me, and his eyes were filled with tears.

"Oh, R——!" I moaned; "you have taken away from me the burden and misery which hung over my whole life, and threatened to drag me down; but it will crush me if you go. Life is too heavy for me: I cannot bear it."

He drew my head to his breast, and drew his hand lovingly over my hair.

"My child, it is not life that is weighing you down. Nature's intentions towards us are great and good; but men and their laws have spoilt everything. Fate is not so hard on all as she is on us; but we must bear it."

I felt the beating of his heart and the vibration of his voice.

I knew that we both realized the burden and the responsibility of the moment—recognised also as we thus sat together how greatly we needed all our self-control. It was because we really loved, and because our feelings were pure, that, in spite of our human passions, we preserved our dignity. We had suddenly become so earnest and quiet. The torrent of feelings had flowed back within bounds—the broad, deep bounds of two human beings whose love is too strong to commit the smallest outward offence against the human law.

There remained only the great, calm, all-pervading feeling that my soul and his were one.

"I will be with you, and will never abandon you, even though distance separate us," he said simply.

"I thank you."

I saw how pure and great his thoughts were, and I wished to be like him, and to imitate his example. It was, as it were, against my will that the words burst forth :

"Stay with me."

His eyes began to flash, and his face gave signs of an inward struggle ; and then he seemed to cast some thought from his mind. His eyes looked straight into mine.

He murmured, in an almost inaudible tone,—

"Shall I teach thee what this life in truth to be is found?
It is renunciation, when its deepest depth we sound:
Seeing, knowing, comprehending, and with parting it is bound."

I was sitting there rigid and motionless, almost stunned, when a horrible ring of laughter sounded in my ears. It struck me like a sharp knife, which pierced through my wounded and overflowing heart, tearing up the sacred feeling I had buried there.

"Ha, ha, ha! I call this a good joke. Why, the fellow is really made of wood — stiff and conventional to the last degree; there's nothing natural left in him.

"Ha, ha! I do call that learning the moral catechism by heart. There is a woman kneeling before him, who seems to be, by the bye, somewhat imperfectly versed in that same catechism, who embraces him like a fury, and entreats him—ha, ha!—to allow her to remain with him. And this piece of Anglican wood, this stiff wax figure, lets himself be treated thus, quotes a poor rhyme, and *exit*.

"Ha, ha! Or was it only horror at the wife of another man throwing herself at his head? and yet the opportunity was a good one. As representing the audience, I don't know whether to applaud or hiss."

The laughter sounds grimly,—as the laughter of fiends in hell, as if all the pure and elevated feelings

were hacked to pieces, ground to dust, and scattered to the winds. I felt as if I were stretched on the rack. The wild anger of a husband would have seemed as a relief from that devilish laughter.

He stood at the half-open door of his study, his hands on his hips, with a wicked expression on his mouth and in his eyes. Never had the abyss between us been so yawning, so boundless, so utterly impassable.

How could I ever have loved two men so utterly different?

Yes, he laughed and mocked, and made me endure the vulgarity of his whole mind. And yet I really believe that he appeared to himself extraordinarily grand and worldly-wise.

He knew the world, and knew also the wisest steps to take.

He was living beyond the attribute of Prince Galitzen—"Thou shalt do no murder." It had never even entered his head to kill any one.

Who would commit such folly? He had not even turned the lovers out, as Galitzen had done to his rival, and the idea of repudiating his wife had likewise not occurred to him. There was no question of forgiveness either. Mockery is the best and the most convenient weapon.

Ha, ha! he knew the silly woman with her fantastic ideas of love—her ideal æsthetic love—on

account of which he had always chaffed her, and which was to his mind a very burdensome addition.

She had got herself into a nice position. This is what this æsthetic love led to: the worship of a block —an idol—a conventional dummy. Now he was master of the situation, and wished to show that people who are reasonable in their love, who understand how to enjoy life, get much more out of it.

These are the terms in which he would have described the situation; this would have been the caricature he would have drawn of the pure man if he had had the representation of the matter.

You see, dear sister, it was this that urged me with irresistible force to awaken what had so long been buried in the past, because the appearance of my husband as he stood laughing at the door was so forcibly recalled to me by the passage we were reading in which Prince Galitzen makes his hero burst forth with the following words: "I did not kill her," and then described how, having restored the moral health of his wife, he then forgave her. And what a hero he appeared to himself! "You have acted like a good man," he says approvingly to himself, and how good and noble he will appear to his readers of both sexes, unless they have gone through a similar experience in their own lives.

Yes, they must know that he wrote his own version of the story. Whether it would have sounded just

the same if the wife of that "good man" had written her account, I cannot tell. I only know one side of the description, nor even how far that is false or true. In any case, I think that the feelings of this common life together are expressed in a one-sided manner. What to the husband may have sufficed with his wide manifold interests and stirring outside life, in whose past so many had had a share, were to her, with her great, longing woman's heart, but crumbs thrown out to appease her hunger.

And the description of the friends of his youth—that is also one-sided.

We must hear what the wife has to say—whether he was worthy of her love and yearning, whether he was capable of being all to her that a warm, sensitive heart yearns for, or whether it was all an error.

Whether it was right or wrong, I know not; therefore I am unable to pronounce a decision. Society says it was wrong; but it lies so often, and why should not it lie in the present case, when it has Nature against it?

Yes: "Thou shalt do no murder."

If my husband had written my story, how very different it would have sounded! What a sorry figure I should have cut, as well as he for whom I should have given up my excellent and renowned spouse, if, fortunately, the man had not been too stiff, too conventional, or too worldly-wise. But my husband has

not considered it worth while to write a story about it, or even to make it a subject of reflection—it was only a matter for sport.

From his own point of view he had done his duty. He had shared everything with me, and had procured me every comfort, and allowed me full liberty. And I, his wife, had been such a simpleton, that instead of falling down and worshipping him, I had transferred my affections to a conventional creature who, in spite of all the overtures I made him, actually ran away. It really was a subject for mirth.

Now, at least, the wife will become reasonable. Yes, I did become reasonable, though he did not only refrain from putting me to a physical death, and did not even repudiate me, but only laughed at me.

It is not only the sorrow itself, but the consciousness of it. Conscience is the blessing and the curse of mankind.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" are Christ's words, and that is why His cup of sorrow was so bitter—more than it could have been to any other—and He must needs drink to the end, because His heart was so great, His love so sacred, and His consciousness so deep. That is why He has become the Consoler and the Redeemer of mankind, and their pattern. If only men would not make a God of Him, and thereby take away from Him the merit of His redeeming power!

CHAPTER XIII

I NEVER saw my friend again. I spent the night following on our parting, alone in my study, pacing up and down the room. Terrible hours, in which the thoughts rushed through my brain like a storm of wind. I knew not whether to live or to die.

But as a star in the dark night, and trembling, through the darkness came the thought: He knows all, understands all, and will do what is best.

The next morning a letter was brought to me. "A man-servant left it," said the maid. "I was told to give it to Madame with my own hands."

"BELOVED A——,

"I am leaving to-day. It must be so—believe me, it must be so. We could neither of us go through a second parting like that of yesterday. You know your duty, as do I.

"There remains but little time, but what there is belongs to you. I will not boast of my strength, and I do not know if there were more time I should do over again what I have done.

"I know not if my strength comes from weakness, but I know I am doing what is right.

"I await your call, if necessity urge it. Be calm, and do not become a prey to despair. You know that you have a friend even beyond death. Death! ah, if it would only tarry, that I might watch over your life!

"Yours to the end,

"R——."

No more time. I seized at once the terrible meaning of those words. My friend had no more time, because death was about to show him the last step of life.

During the terrible moments which followed, I was haunted in all I did by the image of him which rose in my mind. I seemed to see his pale lips move, and to hear him murmur, "No more time."

How completely he had understood me, and our relation to one another! How pure, and great, and good his thoughts had been! "You know your duty"—I kept these words before me constantly, and determined to be worthy of his confidence in me.

I went through my household and wifely duties as far as it lay in my power.

My husband looked down upon me with a sarcastic smile, and went about as usual, without thinking about me one way or another, unless he needed my

help. Indeed, things remained pretty much as they did before, except that he occasionally burst out laughing, with a hideous and wicked expression in his face.

"I should scarcely have thought he would go off in this manner, after you had prepared such a touching scene for him, and after you had confided to him how badly I treated you. Ha, ha, ha!"

He pretended to shake himself with mirth.

"You see how one can mistake the most noble thoughts of one's friend."

I said nothing, and left the room, wondering to myself that even this did not disturb my equanimity.

After receiving R——'s letter, everything was perfectly indifferent to me. I felt dead to everything else in the world and all human feeling in me seemed to be stifled.

"I have no time"—those words seemed to swallow up everything else. It even took away the deep consolation of that other phrase, "I await your call."

The thought grew stronger within me, and the terror increased, so that there was no room in life for any other feeling.

Then I was fully prepared for the letter I received some months later, which, though it brought no further news, yet it took from me the last ray of hope by the certainty of its contents, and threw me on a bed of sickness.

"When you receive these lines, I shall be far away from you—I who, since I knew you, have been near to you every hour, every moment of the day.

"We have enjoyed what has been given to few—we have had a short span of life that has not been quite lonely. We have been inseparable, though distance has come between us.

"I am obliged to leave you alone, and that is why it is so difficult to die—for me to whom, from a child, dying seemed so easy. But you must remain and finish your difficult task. It is the last counsel of a friend that I enjoin upon you. Farewell, for I cannot say 'auf weidersehn.' Would that it were possible!

"Yours in death, as in life,

"R——."

The page lies before me. How often it has lain there, and how many tears have fallen upon it, as if they were jealously striving to blot out the last trembling lines—the last counsel of a friend!

With it was sent a small sheet with a few words written in bold, firm writing, very much like R——'s own handwriting,—

"My brother wrote these lines six hours before his death, and entreated me to send them to you. He wept as he wrote, and they were the first tears I had ever seen him shed. He died as a hero, after much suffering."

I felt a wish to write to the brother for further particulars, but I did not like to do so.

For a whole year I was so completely shattered, mentally and physically, that there was no thought of moving. Then I awoke gradually to the outward life, but I was a changed person.

The physician said later on, "Her young and strong constitution has saved her." I thought it could only have been my evil genius.

For why should I live if he were dead?

Without a friend in the wide world—alone as before. No; for I had yet to seek what was to be done. I had to realize my ideal. But now there was nothing to do: the world was empty.

But I had something to accomplish—my duty!

And each day this duty seemed to reveal itself with greater clearness. It bid me rise from my sick bed, leave my husband's roof, and seek my destiny in the uncertain future. It was this unmistakable conviction of duty which gave me the strength and courage to bear the anger of my relatives, as also the pain which I knew my action must inflict upon them, and to tear myself of my own free will from the circle of those who had once honoured and loved me.

You know all this, dear sister. You know what they said, because you were with them at the time. Forgive me for opening anew the old wounds.

You and my mother sorrowed over me, and wept for me. It broke my mother's heart, and caused you to grow prematurely old.

Yes, you sorrowed and wept, but even you believed what was said. Even you, my nearest relations—who knew me, and in whose midst I was brought up—you believed those things against me. You listened with bleeding hearts, and faces burning with shame, when my brother told you that I had brought shame and disgrace upon our name and our family, and that I had run away to commit common adultery.

You looked upon me as a low, fallen woman, and grieved over me as such. My mother wrote me a letter full of pity and love; she was willing to take me to her heart, and to raise me up, if only I would come to her, and confess my shame, and repent.

It was a letter full of a mother's love, but there was not one word which showed that she had not also judged by appearances.

I took up the letter, and flung the fragments in the ocean, and laughed as the waves engulfed them.

He was dead!

Ah, truly this is a comical world!

My heart was full of bitterness against you. I never wrote one line of self-justification.

When there is no natural bridge of understanding between two souls, no words can bring them into closer communication.

It was one early morning, after a sleepless night of long-drawn-out sorrow, that I left my husband's house. But the act was neither hasty nor premeditated.

During the long months of convalescence spent on my couch the true recognition of what my duty was had flashed upon me: it was the sacred duty I owed to my higher and better self.

At first I had had difficulty in discovering wherein lay my duty.

The image of R —— was ever before my mind. His eyes looked me through and through with questioning gaze, and there had been for some time no answer.

He had recognised his duty, and had done it to the last. He had wisely left it to me to find out where mine lay, knowing well that there is no more hopeless condition than that which makes us turn to others that they may decide what our duty is. We are poor soulless creatures in very truth if we lose our own individuality.

At a time when the very pinions of my soul had lost their power, I had been revived by a spark of his fire—he had restored my strength until it had slowly developed, during my long illness, without my being conscious, even at a time when physically I was near death.

The greatest service which one human being can

render another is to lead him gently back to the path of his own individuality—a path he must tread alone ; nor should the adviser strive to lead him aside from that path by any by-ways suggested by his own inclination. A strong individual nature will resist the attempt, but a weak one will be killed like a plant whose roots have been torn up.

It was only after his death that I fully appreciated the greatness and unselfishness of R——'s conduct towards me. He had stood high above the judgment of the world and its conventional standpoint of right and wrong.

He had gone away knowing that I alone could strike the balance between me and the world.

He had sacrificed, without a moment's hesitation, his own happiness, and though he knew how short a span of life yet remained, he never strove to influence my train of thought. He was dead. The light of his life was extinguished. Nevertheless, a spark of his fire lived in me, and leaped into a flame which consumed with its scorching breath what was false and untenable—all that had lowered and hampered the development of life.

And when the purifying flame had done its work, there came to me an answer to my question, and it ran thus : My duty is to live in such a way that I can respect myself.

And when I had fully realized that the answer was

a true one, I left my husband's house never to return.

I brought neither shame nor disgrace upon you by leaving, but I should have brought them upon myself if I had remained.

"Farewell! I am leaving you never to return. I am parting from you without any hatred in my heart. It was neither your fault nor mine that our hopes were dashed to the ground, and that in me the sense of right was well-nigh deadened.

"The fault lies in the hard, inflexible creed of those who call themselves the world, and in those laws that boldly take upon themselves to bind together without power of separation, two souls who have never really known or fully loved one another; and as if mocking at Nature, who has created these two for the sole purpose of developing, during their short span of life, each single individual existence—these very laws forge chains which irrevocably bind these souls together until they return to the chaos from which Nature took them."

This was the letter I left when parting from the man from whom I had hoped for so much happiness, and for so complete an embodiment of my ideals.

Had my husband understood my words?

I heard his answer from my relations, who cast me out from their midst.

No one at home knew that R—— was dead; no

one ever knew the cause of my illness. If I had said, "He is dead; I am going out alone into the world to what I believe to be right for me," should I have been understood? Would Society have believed me, even though my evidence had been supported by proof? No; for Society has neither head nor heart, nor any aspiration after individuality.

People would simply have shaken their heads, and said I was mad. It was well for me that I strove no longer to please them, and no longer asked for their consent to the course of life I had chosen to adopt.

But how much vitality and happiness are wasted for those who are trained and directed to dance to the capricious music of public opinion before they are able to resist the influence of their bringing up, and before they succeed in restoring the dignity of their own individuality.

> "Ich lernte diese Welt verachten
> Nun bin ich erst sie zu erobern werth."
> (*Goethe's "Faust," second part.*)

I have realized the truth of Goethe's words in my own life. As the ship sailed over the waves of the ocean, bearing me to the land of my friend, and to the uncertain future awaiting me there, I felt a return of physical and mental power, under the influence of the conviction that I was doing what was right. My feelings towards the world and life and my fellow creatures seemed to lose some of their bitterness.

The farther I got away from them, and the surer I felt of never returning to the former state of things, the less scorn I felt ; the old world in which I lived had become too indifferent to admit the possibility of hatred.

What they might be thinking or saying of me at home caused me as little anxiety and fear as the storms which made the ship's timbers creak, bringing the passengers to their knees in prayer and tears, and distorting the face of the sailors with terror. The struggle of the elements had no effect upon me—a more terrible storm raged in my heart. Nevertheless, I had gone forth as a triumphant conqueror.

But I wished nevertheless to go on living, and I found this out by the joy I experienced when our battered ship landed on the shore of the new country.

A totally new existence lay before me. I did not start on my new life with the feeling of loneliness that had overpowered me before I knew R——, or at the moment of that first anguish when I realized that I should never again hear the voice of my friend. I began full of courage and hope and belief in myself ; I was inspired by a glorious feeling of freedom. I had cast from me the very cause of my loneliness, for only he can be lonely who feels that he does not belong to those around him, though he wishes to do so.

I felt myself a part of nature and the world, but

an individual part, and not one who wished to merge herself in another.

Love and gratitude often took me to his grave, which was marked by a tombstone bearing nothing but his name. I always brought away from the spot a renewal of courage and belief in humanity. The mere human personality of R—— has, in the course of years, died out of my memory ; he lives only as the principle of what is good, noble, and true in man —as the embodiment of that principle without a shadow of deceit.

My new life, looked at from an unprejudiced point of view, has taught me much, and brought me pure and great joy.

I have learnt to love the world again, because I have met many people whose good strong natures have not come to grief on the jagged rocks and pointed cliffs of conventionalism. I believe that I have helped a few in the dangers which threatened their life-ship, when guided only by their own inexperienced hand. I have loved many a one with warm affection just at a time when they were loneliest —that is, when most surrounded by the world.

I have sympathized in the joy and sorrow of many a young life, and out of the mire of vulgarity I have often found the golden grain of noble aspiration.

I have never heard what the world thought of me, or what people said about me—it would have been

an empty noise, a senseless clatter in my ears. I have been free and happy, and have showed a clear, open face to the world, in spite of calumny and scorn, because I did my duty in helping and loving and in showing understanding and sympathy for all the lonely groping souls with whom I was brought into contact.

"Therefore these three abide, hope, love, and charity; but the greatest of all is charity."

These words now stand on his tombstone under his name, in unskilful lettering from an inexperienced hand.

I myself traced them out the night before I left his native country—that country in which I had found so many noble people, and which brought so much deep joy into my life.

When we first met again, sister, you were surprised to find me so calm and so full of the interest of life.

You thought to find an unhappy, crushed creature, disillusioned and persecuted, whom you would take to your heart; but I came to you free and content.

When we learn to despise what the world says of us, and to follow what we ourselves recognise to be the right path, then only are we free.

We may be Don Quixotes, but that matters but little if only we have this belief in a better future and better social dispensations.

The grass of time has long since grown over the

memory of all I experienced from him, and I should not even have spoken of it to you, dear sister, if what had so long slumbered had not been awakened by the one-sided writing we have just read ; and though the words were written in my heart's blood, I felt as if, at all costs, I must attempt a defence—a plea for my oppressed and trampled-down sex.

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